

MYSTICISM

Value and Validity of Mystical Experiences

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Mystiset kokemukset ovat hyvin erityislaatuisia kokemuksia, jotka kuvausten ja määritelmien perusteella näyttäisivät ylittävän normaalin käsityskykymme rajat aina sen perustavimpia rakenteita myöten. Kautta aikojen, mystikot lähtöisin lukuisista eri perinteistä ja jopa täysin perinteiden ulkopuolelta ovat kertoneet kohdanneensa toisenlaisen todellisuuden, joka sen julkilausumattomuudesta huolimatta on näyttäytynyt paljon todellisempaan kuin tavallinen todellisuus.

Tarkastelen tutkielmassani mystisismin ja mystisten kokemusten merkityksellisyyttä, arvoa ja validiteettia. Mystisten kokemusten luonne ja määritelmä rajaavat samalla yleisemmin mystisismin luonnetta ja filosofisen mystisismin keskiössä onkin jo yli vuosisadan ollut kysymys mystisten kokemusten luonteesta. Ovatko mystiset kokemukset oma, erityislaatuinen kokemusten luokkansa, vai kuuluvatko ne perustaltaan tavallisten kokemusten luokkaan? Tämä kysymys on myös tutkielmani keskiössä. Esitän oman vastaukseni kysymykseen, mikä mahdollistaa pyrkimykseni mystisismin merkityksellisyyden ja arvon jatkotarkasteluun.

Mystisten kokemusten julkilausumattomuuden ongelma ei hälvene vastauksestani huolimatta, vaan se kulkee oleellisena osana läpi koko tutkielman. Määrittelen sen avulla niitä rajoja, joiden puitteissa tarkastelen mystisismin ja mystisten kokemusten merkityksellisyyttä ja arvoa eri konteksteissa.

Mystikoiden kokema ja kuvaama mystinen todellisuus pitää sisällään yksinkertaisesti kaiken mahdollisen. Ulkopuolinen fyysinen maailma ja kokija itse kietoutuvat mystisesti tähän julkilausumattomaan korkeimpaan Todellisuuteen. Tarkastelen mystisen Todellisuuden ja tavallisen todellisuuden erojen, ja mystiseltä kannalta myös välttämättömän yhteneväisyyden merkitystä, sekä niitä tapoja joilla voimme näitä hyvin erilaisia todellisuuksia ylipäätään lähestyä.

Yhdistävänä teemana läpi koko tutkielman on pyrkimykseni osoittaa että mystisismi ja mystiset kokemukset ovat merkityksellisiä ja valideja tapoja yrittää ymmärtää todellisuuden luonnetta. Pyrin osoittamaan että mystisismin merkitys ei rajoitu vain akateemisen mystisismin ja uskonnon filosofian piiriin, vaan mystisismi on, kuten se on ollut kautta aikojen, merkityksellinen tapa ymmärtää ja lähestyä todellisuuden perimmäisintä olemusta.

Asiasanat: mysticism, mystical experience, perennialism, constructivism

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages humans have attempted to understand the nature of reality and the meaning of our own fleeting existence. Contemporary scholarly mysticism is continuation; an addendum to a millennia of curious minds seeking answers to “eternal questions”. It deals with everything from absolute emptiness of experiences free from all conceptual constraints, all the way to the fullness of the Reality incorporating absolutely everything; every possible thing.

The task of scholarly mysticism is to try to limit the limitless, to comprehend the incomprehensible. The boundaries and limitations of scholarly mysticism are the limits of our capability to understand the experiences of mystics who have been able to transcend the very same limitations. I believe that the main task of mysticism is not the exploration of these boundaries but to seek ways and approaches to expand them and thereby take us towards an ever better understanding of the mystical reality that is hiding behind these limitations. It is the task of mysticism to bring down all possible barriers and see the Truth of mystics as clearly as possible.

There is no doubt in my mind that the mere possibility of the existence of the Truth that is within the reach of a mystical vision, that is, a form of perception human beings have the capacity for, is indeed the only satisfying goal for a quest for the fundamental answers for—to put it mildly—everything. But this quest, as we shall see, is—to again put it mildly—inconceivable. Like we can read from the anonymous author of *Theologia Germanica*:

The things which are in part can be apprehended, known, and expressed; but the Perfect cannot be apprehended, known, or expressed by any creature as creature. Therefore we do not give a name to the Perfect, for it is none of these. The creature as creature cannot know nor apprehend it, name nor conceive it (T. I, p.2.).¹

¹ Kingsland 1927: 8

The above quote illustrates the difficult task that every study of mysticism must address. The key object motivating this study is my desire to make some progress, however limited, in comprehending mysticism as a phenomenon or a concept, which by definition lies beyond ordinary comprehension.

1.1. Defining Mysticism

Mysticism is the art of union with Real
-Evelyn Underhill, Practical Mysticism

In general, the usage of the term ‘mysticism’ has a great variety of meanings. Anything that is somehow ‘weird,’ ‘otherworldly,’ or ‘spiritual’ is often and mistakenly labeled as being mystical and thus inferred to belong to mysticism. However, mysticism can also be any of those things depending on how one relates to different aspects of what mysticism can contain. Mysticism deals with the fundamental aspects of reality and states of consciousness far removed from what is generally understood to be “normal”. In other words, mysticism explores the mystical side of reality. William Kingsland writes:

Mysticism is essentially the exercise of a supernormal faculty transcending intellect, whereby the individual obtains a vital and conscious experience in his inmost being of his oneness with what has been variously termed the Absolute, or Reality, or the Intelligible world, or the Infinite, or God a sense of union with the transcendent yet immanent Root and Source of all Being and all Becoming.²

Kingsland is describing mystical experiences and a vast majority of studies on mysticism seem to agree with their central role. I strongly agree with this and in my opinion any philosophical inquiry into mysticism must take a stance regarding the nature of mystical experiences. As we shall see in the third chapter, the way one conceives the nature of mystical experiences directs any further inquiries into greatly differing directions.

² Kingsland 1927: vi-vii

Mysticism can be a study of Absolutes; highest possible manifestations of Reality or it can be reduced to a mere subchapter in the study of atypical states of consciousness.

Accepting any validity to mystical experiences as a non-ordinary state of consciousness with an actual object is often limited to mysticism stemming from specific traditions that already acknowledge such an object. For example, Christian mysticism has no trouble examining the object of mystical experiences as God of the Scripture whereas Gnostic mysticism can assume the experienced object to be Heavenly Pleroma. These kind of mystical paradigms offer guidelines on how to approach mysticism and mystical experiences. Alfred Sharpe presents an illustrative example of Christian mysticism:

Mysticism is the final step, in one direction, of the differentiating process. As God, the personal and transcendent Creator, is the ultimate term of metaphysics, so the mystical or immediate knowledge of God is the ultimate of that relation of the human soul to Him, as its source, object and end, which constitutes religion.³

However, in this study I will not approach the topic from any particular religious, spiritual, or theological position. Mysticism and mystical experiences deal with a type of a reality consisting of concepts that are far removed from what we are accustomed to. I therefore believe that it is more appropriate to approach the subject without forcing it into any of the various, existing conceptual schemes whose validity I would have to either validate or assume. Instead, I believe in the value of maintaining an open-minded approach without an intellectual commitment to any strict definition of mysticism, acknowledging not just the difficulties but also the opportunities that such an approach entails. The scope of the subject matter for open inquiry into mysticism is well described by Edward Watkin who called mysticism as philosophy of the Unlimited.

Historically the most satisfactory metaphysic has employed mystical data. I have therefore endeavoured in this book to state the metaphysic implicit in mystical experience, a philosophy of mysticism. This philosophy is the body of truth about the nature of ultimate reality and of our relationship to it to be derived from the content of mystical experience.⁴

³ Sharpe 1910: xxviii

⁴ Watkin 1920: 11

What Watkin seems to be saying is that mysticism is better understood as a study of the fundamental aspects of reality that are revealed to the mystic in the form of a mystical experience where s/he encounters the mystical object. I strongly agree with Watkins emphasis on this side of Mysticism. However, It is clear that mysticism takes its shape and form from mystical experiences and their nature should be established at least to some degree before examining the mystical object that the mystics encounter.

Before proceeding, I feel it is necessary to make few remarks regarding the connection of mysticism and mystical experiences with religious experiences. Especially in religious studies mystical and religious experiences are often equated and mystical experiences are seen as “intense” or “high” form of religious experience. This is not necessarily wrong, but I feel that the gap between the two types of experiences is so vast that equating them can be quite misleading. Here, I will be emphasizing the unique nature of mystical experiences, highlighting that they contain characteristics that no other experience possess. I feel that mysticism should be treated as a unique phenomenon and any labels and characterizations should be given to it only after careful consideration; something I am aiming to accomplish in this study.

In the end, mysticism is an extremely complex and multifaceted topic. Its subject matter goes beyond the realm of ordinary and the scholar of mysticism must try to understand something that by definition can never be fully understood. But I feel that this is also the beauty of mysticism and its study; whereof one cannot speak, thereof scholar of mysticism cannot remain silent.

1.2. Purpose of This Study

Regardless of the difficulties encountered in and around mysticism, it is my purpose to attempt to study the validity and the value of mystical experiences. The validity of mysticism is directly proportional to the validity of mystical experiences. In chapter two, I will present some common definitions and categories for mystical experiences. As we shall see, there have been various ways to define them. The main purpose of this chapter is not to declare what mystical experiences actually are, but to illuminate the type of experiences mysticism deals with and to set the stage for the third chapter where I will introduce and take part in a century old debate between perennialism and constructivism

regarding the nature of mystical experiences. This debate and the position one takes in it is a great turning point in any study of mysticism; the choice one makes dictates where one can proceed and which questions become meaningful. This chapter also acts as my central argument regarding the validity of mysticism and mystical experiences.

Chapter four is a direct consequence of my own position in the debate that allows me to approach the object of mystical experiences. I feel that the mere ability to explore the object of mystical experience shows not just the scope, but also the value of mysticism. With what I see as a very well justified premise, it is possible to ask some eternal questions and even gain glimpses and vague outlines of answers.

In chapter five, I will compare mysticism with science. Natural sciences share a similar goal to mysticism in that they are both attempts to better understand this reality we exist in. I will compare the ways in which this understanding is gained in an attempt to show that even if science can be seen as anti-mystical, it does not manage to invalidate the type of understanding and knowledge that mysticism and mystical experiences provide. I will also examine some approaches that cognitive sciences have taken to understand mystical experiences and how cognitive science has both tried to validate and invalidate mysticism and mystical experiences.

Chapter six will present some topics where I believe that mysticism can offer valuable framework and perspectives. I feel that this aspect of mysticism has been generally undervalued and underrepresented by scholarly mysticism.

2. TYPES OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

There are a great number of different classifications for mystical experiences. It seems that many, if not most, authors of mysticism like to come up with their own definitions and classifications. I believe that this is mainly done for two reasons. Firstly, it is done in order to make the various aspects of mysticism, which most commonly relate to the epistemological ramifications of mystical experience, to fit in with their academic, spiritual, religious or any such purposes and tasks they aim to accomplish. Secondly, many authors of mysticism have a strong religious background.⁵ They classify the various concepts that can be found in mysticism in a way that is in accordance with their conceptual commitments acquired from their respective religious backgrounds. Buddhist mystic or scholar of mysticism, for example, does not call the object of mystical experience a 'God.' Similarly a mystic or scholar coming from a theistic Abrahamic tradition generally does not classify mystical experiences as pantheistic. However, I believe that we can see the immense power of mystical experiences in instances when mystics are capable of overcoming their religio-cultural background frameworks. This is the case for example with one of the most famous Christian mystics, Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), whose mysticism is strongly pantheistic, at least partly resulting in some of his writings to be condemned by the Church. Another Example with more sinister ending comes from Sufism. Famous Sufi mystic al-Hallaj (858-922) was gruesomely executed because of him openly speaking about mystical experiences⁶. It should be kept in mind that some, myself included, consider mystical experiences to be the culmination of unique type of religious and/or spiritual life; mystics and mystical experiences do not necessarily possess such value within religious traditions.

Comprehensively defining mystical experience is certainly no easy task as most of what it represents and entails is in direct and clear contradiction to normal way of human perception and understanding. Mystical experience does not just defy, and maybe even deny, our everyday understanding of the nature of our own selves and the world

⁵ There are many "sub-fields" of mysticism such as Christian mysticism, Buddhist mysticism, Islamic mysticism and pretty much any tradition that incorporates any form of contact with Gods or Realities above or beyond our own can have mysticism focused only on their respective tradition and its teaching.

⁶ Smart 1998: 281, 298

surrounding us. They can also, as we shall see, defy the very core of logical systems thought to be impenetrable and immutable by any intrusions.

I will next present some scholars' attempts to define mysticism and mystical experiences. It should be kept in mind that mysticism cannot be completely separate from mystical experiences and to some degree defining one also defines the other.

2.1. William James' Mysticism

The most famous and regularly cited view on mystical experiences comes from William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in which he lists four characteristics that according to him are required for the experience to be called 'mystical'.⁷ First two and most important characteristics ("marks") are *ineffability* and *noetic quality*.

Ineffability and especially the problems it brings to dealing with mysticism and mystical experiences is something that is regularly encountered and basically every study dealing with mystical experiences has to somehow deal with it or justify its absence. James' describes ineffable experience:

The Subject of it immediately say that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect.⁸

It is clear how this characteristic can and will be a hindrance in trying to understand mystical experiences. In direct contrast to ineffability is the noetic quality of mystical experiences:

⁷ James 2002: 294-295. James does note that the four marks justify experience to be called mystical in regards to his lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. However, his classification has lived on outside of his own lectures and scholars of mysticism quite often refer to them. But as we shall see, not all are in agreement with him.

⁸ James 2002: 295

Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.⁹

For James these first two characteristics are most important and by themselves “entitle any state to be called mystical.”¹⁰ Mystical experiences are ‘knowledge-giving’ and at the same time they are ineffable and our concepts are not capable of adequately describing the experience from which the noetic quality supposedly has also risen. The inclusion of these two characteristics has led to a long-lasting debate about the nature of mystical experiences and the knowledge they purportedly contain. We will be facing this problem in full force later as it will become the center of our attention in the third and fourth chapter.

The remaining two characteristics are *transiency* and *passivity*, which are rarely even listed in contemporary literature and in the same spirit brief mention of them should suffice. Transiency means that mystical experiences do not last long and passivity refers to the passive character of the experience once it has begun; mystic is not active during the experience but a passive witness to it.¹¹ However, it should be noted that these ‘lesser’ characteristics do appear in scholarly mysticism as part of much more elaborate and wider concepts. For example, transiency can be contrasted with the long lasting psychological transformation of the mystic even from just one mystical experience. Passivity or the lack of it, on the other hand is generally assumed and is one of the main topics in the debate regarding the nature of mystical experiences that will later become our focus.

2.2. Nature-mysticism, Soul-mysticism and God-mysticism

Frederick C. Happold agrees with the James’ four characteristics but he adds three additional characteristics of his own. Continuing on James’ list:

⁹ James 2002: 295

¹⁰ James 2002: 295

¹¹ James 2002: 295

(5) Presence of a *consciousness of the Oneness of everything*

In mystical experience “All is One and One is All” and “All feelings of duality and multiplicity are obliterated, including the duality between man and Deity.”¹² I feel that this in particular, but also the following additions are extremely important addition to James’ list as they do not just give insight into how mystical experiences are ineffable¹³, but also expresses well the immense scope and especially the uniqueness of the subject matter of mysticism.

(6) Sense of *timelessness*

Timelessness further separates mystical experiences from ordinary experiences and Happold argues that they should not be examined through ordinary notions of past, present and future “[f]or the mystic feels himself to be in a dimension where time is not, where ‘all is always now’.”¹⁴

(7) Conviction that the familiar *phenomenal ego is not the real I*

In the unitive mystical experience the “self” of the mystic is no longer separate from the object of the experience but instead becomes something else. It is not the phenomenal ego but the “True or Greater Self” that experiences unity with the Absolute, or in other words becomes/is the Absolute.¹⁵

Happold elaborates on mystical experiences and mysticism beyond a list of characteristics with which to recognize mystical experiences. For Happold the mystical consciousness is:

Particular form of consciousness, out of which arise types of experience, akin to, but not to be confused or equated with, those labeled ‘religious’, and which results in a special sort of spirituality, giving that word a wide connotation, and predisposition to interrogate and interpret the universe in particular way. Further, I have regarded it as a tenable hypothesis that this ‘mystical consciousness’ is, of its nature, in some way a development and extension of rational consciousness, resulting in an enlargement and refining of

¹² Happold 1990: 47

¹³ Even if we have concepts of ‘unity’ and ‘union’ it is obvious that if mystical experience includes complete dissolution of duality and multiplicity it already becomes something that is something totally other and different from ordinary experiences. Such an experience would certainly be impossible to adequately express using ordinary concepts at our disposal.

¹⁴ Happold 1990: 48

¹⁵ Happold 1990: 48-50

perception, and consequently having a noetic quality, so that through it knowledge of the 'real' is gained which could not be gained through rational consciousness.¹⁶

Happold begins by dividing mystical experiences "for convenience" into two types "which may be called the mysticism of love and unions and the mysticism of knowledge and understanding." This division is based on the underlying urge the mystic possesses, but it is not to be seen as definite division as he points out that "they are in no way exclusive, indeed they are always, in some degree, combined". The urge underlying the mysticism of love and union is "to escape from a sense of separation, from the loneliness of selfhood, towards a closer participation and reunion with Nature or God, which will bring peace and rest to the soul". The urge underlying the mysticism of knowledge and understanding is "to find the secret of the universe, to grasp it not in parts but in its wholeness."¹⁷

Happold continues from the convenient division based on the underlying urge the mystic possesses to a division based on the characteristics of the mystical experience by dividing mystical experiences into nature-mysticism, soul-mysticism, and God-mysticism. He points out that his division is just one possible 'angle' to view mystical experiences. I could not agree more with this kind of an open and non-restrictive approach. Beyond the valuable clarity of his definitions, his divisions capture at least in part what, in my view, is essential about mysticism and mystical experiences in particular, but as he himself admits, it is just one possible 'angle'.

2.2.1. Nature-Mysticism

In nature-mysticism the experienced mystical object¹⁸ is seen to manifest as the totality of Nature. Everything is God and in mystical experience unity is attained with the God, with everything. As an example of nature-mysticism Happold uses a poem by English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850):¹⁹

¹⁶ Happold 1990: 17

¹⁷ Happold 1990: 40-41

¹⁸ Happold uses the terms God and the One

¹⁹ Happold 1990: 43

*A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.*

Happold also describes experiences of Richard Jefferies (1848-1987), an English nature writer as an example of nature mysticism. According to him, Jeffries was also an atheist, which makes his mystical experiences especially interesting since there was no religious doctrine or God of any definition to guide his mystical quest²⁰. Jeffries describes his experiences in his “The Story of My Heart”:

Then I addressed the sun, desiring the soul equivalent of his light and brilliance, his endurance and unwearied race. I turned to the blue heaven over, gazing into its depth, inhaling its exquisite colour and sweetness. The rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky drew my soul towards it, and there it rested, I for pure colour is rest of heart. By all these I prayed; I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no other.²¹

It is certainly not uncommon phenomenon to feel deep emotions when one is engulfed in admiring the natural beauty of our world or stargazing and realizing the depths and scope of the space surrounding our planet. In nature-mysticism the nature seems to acts as a sort of a meditative object that when truly realized the totality of nature is revealed.

2.2.2. Soul-Mysticism

Soul-mysticism seems to be the opposite of nature-mysticism. There is no God that is experienced, nor is there any union with any mystical entity, be it God, Nature or the Absolute. God is totally absent in the experience. The soul or the spirit of the mystic is itself numinous and in the mystical experience this soul enters into a “complete isolation

²⁰ Happold 1990: 384-385

²¹ Jeffries 1883: 4

from everything that is other than itself” and “The chief object of man is the quest of his own self and of right knowledge about it.”²²

Main idea seems to be that the outside world and our normal ways of experiencing it are obstructing the mystic from experiencing the Truth of the Self. The mystic quest is not towards the outside world or beyond it, but it is aimed inwards, with the goal of purifying all of the obstructions that are denying the true self (*i.e.*, the soul or the spirit) from realizing its true and numinous eternal nature. Our normal way of experiencing and understanding the world can be seen as a conceptual prison that prevents us from seeing the truth lying outside. Just like in Plato’s cave, we only see the shadow play of the Truth.

Happold considers Meister Eckharts’ mysticism to be a combination of God and soul-mysticism: “In Eckhart’s teaching, beneath sense perception, beneath the sensuous will, beneath the higher power of memory, reason and reasonable will, lies the soul, the apex, the spark, the heaven within. It is there that man may find God”.²³

2.2.3. God-Mysticism

In God-mysticism, the aspects from both soul-mysticism and nature-mysticism are combined. The basic idea here is that the “soul” or the “spirit” of the mystic returns to its “Infinite Ground”. In this process both the self and the world are completely obliterated to give “room” to the mystical experience as the mystic is able to experience that which is God. This kind of obliteration of the self and the world is very common in the eastern mystical traditions. In western mystical traditions it is more common to say that the soul is ‘deified,’ which means that instead of obliterating the self and the world. Mystic becomes God in a process of union without necessarily losing his/her identity but instead transforms into something else. As a result a new, mystical identity is achieved.²⁴

Happold also points out that these types are not to be seen as clear-cut divisions and categories isolated from each other. Instead they can, and often do, intermix and co-exist:

²² Happold 1990: 44

²³ Happold 1990: 270-271

²⁴ Happold 1990: 44-45

With the exception of pure soul-mysticism, mystical experiences may take several analogous forms. They may be (1) pan-en-henic, i.e. the sense of the all in an undifferentiated non-dual One and this One in the all; or (2) pan-en-theistic, i.e. the sense that all is in God and God is in all; or (3) pan-theistic. In this latter either Deity or the 'divine' is felt as being 'contained' within creation, or that, to quote from the Upanishads, 'there is nothing in the world which is not God'.²⁵

In sum, Happold's definition offers a good 'angle' to approach mystical experiences. However, as we will see in the next chapter, definitions offer potential to form typologies but focusing on them can also be problematic.

2.3. Introvertive and Extrovertive Mystical Experiences

There are alternative ways to distinguish across different types of mystical experiences. Walter Terence Stace (1886-1967), among others, makes a straightforward, simple and popular division between introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences:

The essential difference between them is that the extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind. Both culminate in the perception of an ultimate Unity-what Plotinus called the One-with which the perceiver realizes his own union or even identity. But the extrovertive mystic, using his physical senses, perceives the multiplicity of external material objects- the sea, the sky, the houses, the trees- mystically transfigured so that the One, or the Unity, shines through them. The Introvertive mystic, on the contrary, seeks by deliberately shutting off the senses, by obliterating from consciousness the entire multiplicity of sensations, images, and thoughts, to plunge into the depths of his own ego. There in that darkness and silence, he alleges that he perceives the One-and is united with it-not as a Unity seen through the multiplicity (as in extrovertive experience), but as the wholly naked One devoid of plurality whatever.²⁶

Division of mystical experiences to introvertive and extrovertive types is a very broad one. William Rowe summarizes: "The extrovertive way looks outward through the senses

²⁵ Happold 1990: 43

²⁶ Stace 1961: 61-62 emphasis added

into the world around us and finds the divine reality there. The introvertive way turns inward and finds the divine reality in the deepest part of the self.”²⁷

As we can see from the quote from Stace above, it certainly seems that the division is primarily a methodological one at its core, but that it ultimately seems to lead to a similar “perception of an ultimate Unity”. However, this kind of view is not often found among scholars of mysticism. A further examination reveals that also Stace ends up regarding these two types of mystical experiences to be of very different kinds and not just because of the initial methodology used in attaining the experience.

2.3.1. Extrovertive Mystical Experience

Stace explores seven different mystical extrovertive experiences and, based on those, he provides a list of common characteristics for extrovertive mystical experiences.²⁸

1. The unifying vision, expressed abstractly by the formula "All is One." The One is, in extrovertive mysticism, perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects.
2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as being an inner subjectivity in all things, described variously as life, or consciousness, or a living Presence. The discovery that nothing is "really" dead.
3. Sense of objectivity or reality.
4. Feeling of blessedness, joy, happiness, satisfaction, etc.
5. Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, or sacred, or divine. This is the quality which gives rise to the interpretation of the experience as being an experience of "God." It is the specifically religious element in the experience. It is closely intertwined with, but not identical with, the previously listed characteristic of blessedness and joy.
6. Paradoxicality.
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable, incapable of being described in words, etc.

²⁷ Rowe 2007: 78

²⁸ Stace 1961: 79

The list seems to describe something very similar to Happold's nature mysticism and the Jeffries' experience fits well with the list. Stace himself quotes Eckhart as an example of extrovertive type of mystical experience:

All that a man has externally in multiplicity is intrinsically One. Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are One. This is the deepest depth.²⁹

In the quote Eckhart is speaking about external things, blades of grass, wood and stone. This clearly refers to using one's own physical senses. Eckhart, even if he does not specifically point out that he himself is the one having the mystical experience, I trust Stace when he points out that: "But no one who is familiar with his style of writing can doubt that the "depth" of which he speaks is the depth of his own experience."³⁰

Here we can clearly see the inherent difficulties in understanding mysticism and accepting mystical experiences as real. How can grass, wood and stone be the same as such state clearly violates the core logic that makes us able to understand the world of divisions filled with separate entities that surround us. For stone to be lying on the grass we need to have assumed and maintained a separation between the stone and the grass, for without separation they could not possess such or any relation with each other. It seems that in the extrovertive mystical experience distinction and identity co-exist in some peculiar, that is, mystical way. Stace quotes Rudolf Otto in this matter:³¹

Black does not cease to be black, nor white white. But black is white and white is black. The opposites coincide without ceasing to be what they are in themselves.

It is certainly difficult for someone who has not had an experience of this kind, where distinction and identity co-exist, to accept that such an experience is possible. This is a

²⁹ Stace 1961: 63

³⁰ Stace 1961: 64

³¹ Stace 1961: 65

clear example of the kind of problem that arises from the ineffable nature of mystical experiences.

2.3.2. Introvertive Mystical Experience

Stace also explores different introvertive mystical experiences and provides a list of common characteristics for them:³²

1. The Unitary Consciousness, from which all the multiplicity of sensuous or conceptual or other empirical content has been excluded, so that there remains only a void and empty unity. This is the one basic, essential, nuclear characteristic, from which most of the others inevitably follow.
2. Being nonspatial and nontemporal. This of course follows from the nuclear characteristic just listed.
3. Sense of objectivity or reality.
4. Feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, happiness, etc.
5. Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred, or divine.
6. Paradoxicality.
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable

The first listed characteristic gives us another example of the extremely paradoxical nature of the subject matter. Since our normal, ordinary consciousness is based on concepts, non-conceptual form of consciousness is certainly difficult to accept and indeed impossible to imagine for someone who has not had mystical experience of the kind. As Stace asks:

Suppose that, after having got rid of all sensations, one should go on to exclude from consciousness all sensuous images, and then all abstract thoughts, reasoning processes, volitions, and other particular mental contents; what would there then be left of consciousness?³³

³² Stace 1961: 110-111

³³ Stace 1961: 85-86

Stace himself believes he has found the answer from the descriptions of the experiences of mystics. Their answer is that it is not a state of unconsciousness as one could assume by its defined lack of any mental content. According to mystics, there is something that Stace calls “pure” consciousness that still remains after all mental content (as we understand it) has been purged from it. This type of “pure” content that remains can be understood as a special type of awareness of one’s true self in its most pure form, the fundamental essence of oneself. There is not any subject that experiences or object that is experienced. Instead, the experience transcends these divisions while still retaining a sense of objectivity. When mystic returns from the experience back to normal non-mystical form of consciousness it is no surprise that lists (7) follows. The experience is something that cannot be reached through our normal conceptual scheme.

To further understand Stace’s version of introvertive mystical experience, he quotes Plotinus as an example for introvertive type of mystical experience that describes the loss of individuality:³⁴

You ask how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The Infinite therefore cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite . . . by entering into a *state in which you are your finite self no longer*. This is . . . the liberation of your mind from finite consciousness. *When you thus cease to be finite you become one with the Infinite*. . . . You realize this union, this identity.

Another example of loss of individuality during introvertive mystical experience Stace gives is from theistic tradition by Henry Suso:³⁵

When the spirit by the loss of its self-consciousness has in very truth established its abode in this glorious and dazzling obscurity, it is set free from every obstacle to union, and from its individual properties . . . when it passes away into God. . . . In this merging of itself in God the spirit passes away.

³⁴ Stace 1961: 112 Emphasis by Stace

³⁵ Stace 1961: 113

Richard H. Jones uses a distinction very similar to that of Staces but by his own accord he draws a more fundamental distinction between depth-mystical and nature-mystical experiences. Depth-mystical experiences are free of all conceptual and sensory content and they seem to be closely related to Staces introvertive experiences. The mystic purges his mind of all dispositional and cognitive content and, with the conceptual barriers gone, the mystic is able to directly experience the Absolute reality. Experiencing the Absolute is not seeing it, but becoming it. Similarly to Stace, the depth-mystical state is not unconscious state but *“Instead this emptiness permits the pouring in of a positive experience.”*³⁶

Nature-mystical experiences have some internal conceptual differentiation just like Stace’s definitions of extrovertive experiences can have, even if actual thought-content and sensory stimuli are not required to be present. Subject and object are still present in the experience as there is a union or merging with something, which involves a differentiation. Mystic can experience that he is part of the Absolute reality, but there is also a “sense of different nexuses within the flow of becoming”.³⁷

Even if the mystical experiences themselves are paradoxical and ineffable, Stace believes that it is possible to rate them. According to Stace:

The extrovertive type of mystical consciousness is in any case vastly less important than the introvertive, both as regards practical influence on human life and history and as regards philosophical implications.³⁸

And later he continues:

“..it looks as if the extrovertive mysticism were a sort of incomplete version of the completeness realized in the introvertive kind. Consciousness or mind is a higher category than life, the top rung of the ladder of life. The extrovertive mystic perceives the universal life of the world, while the introvertive reaches up to the realization of a universal consciousness or mind.”³⁹

³⁶ Jones 1993: 19-20

³⁷ Jones 1993: 20

³⁸ Stace 1961: 62

³⁹ Stace 1961: 133

I cannot agree with Stace on this. Here we have a group of experiences where the multiplicity presented in the outside world is shown ultimately to be of the One source. Doesn't this have great practical influence on human life? If everything around us in the world outside lies on this perceived Divine foundation, doesn't it encourage respect and care in our actions dealing with the outside world? Doesn't it give meaning to our own role as part of something much greater, in a way that no ordinary perception ever could? I do not see how extrovertive and introvertive experiences, even if the division is valid, are more or less valuable when it comes to practical influence on human life they can possess. Jones also seems to offer some support against Stace's view:

While some ordering of mystical experiences is inevitable, there is nothing inherent in the experiences themselves that requires a particular order. Mystical ways of life contain values that determine the significance assigned to each type of experience. For example, theistic traditions may devalue the depth-mystical experience as spiritual self-indulgence in favor of a continuing sense of the presence of God involved in nature-mystical experience. Similarly, other mystical traditions may value the permanent transformation resulting in a state of enlightenment—a nature-mystical state—over any transient experience, including the depth-mystical state. In each case, the various beliefs and values of the mystic's way of life as a whole, not the experiences in isolation, determine the value given each type of experience.⁴⁰

Within each mystically enlightened way of life room must be made for both types of mystical experiences; yet, mystics value each type according to their goals and beliefs, and usually one type is valued more than the other. For instance, the medieval Christian Richard Rolle valued the "rapture without abstention from the senses" over the "rapture involving abstention from the bodily senses"; the latter even sinners have, but the former is a rapture of love that goes to God. A rapture without the senses may reach the ground of the individual self or of creation, but a sense of union is necessary to experience God. Thus a nature-mystical experience is valued by him over the depth-mystical experience. This contrasts with the release (moksha) of Advaita Vedānta. Here concentration (samādhi) leads to the stilling of all mental activity, is central, not any nature-mystical experience.⁴¹

I strongly agree with Jones that personal goals and beliefs play a very important role and it is something that we must acknowledge when trying to understand different aspects of

⁴⁰ Jones 1993: 4

⁴¹ Jones 1993: 21-22

mysticism. Thus, we must try to avoid too strict categories when we explore the often paradoxical concepts found in the field of mysticism. It is for this reason that I will not embrace any limited set (nor types) of different mystical experiences for this study, but instead I will simply view and describe mystical experiences as non-ordinary experiences of fundamental states of self and/or reality. However I will still acknowledge the value of, and will use, the different characterizations for mystical experiences to help understand different aspects of mysticism that this study will explore in later chapters. But to me, the essence of mysticism and mystical experiences is the fundamental Reality they reveal. This will be my premise and main focus in the next two chapters.

As I have mentioned several times, mystical experiences are inherently infused with problem of ineffability and how we can understand anything about their nature when, just by definition, they seem to be inconceivable. The answer to problems presented by ineffability are directly connected to the nature and the object of mystical experiences. I will next present and take part in a debate regarding the nature of mystical experiences.

3. NATURE OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

One of the dominant topics of contemporary scholarly mysticism is the debate between two opposing schools of thought, perennialism and constructivism⁴² regarding the nature of mystical experiences and the possibility of a common source for them even across traditional and cultural boundaries. Donald Rothberg writes:

..two major philosophical questions that have dominated discussions of mysticism since William James: (1) Is there a core mystical experience, a universal experience common to humans across cultures and traditions? (2) Do mystical experiences give veridical insights into certain aspects of reality and into reality as a whole such that mystical claims should be accepted?⁴³

In this chapter the main focus is on the first question.⁴⁴ I will present each of the participants and their arguments in this debate. Significant focus is placed on ineffability and noetic quality, the two main characteristics of mystical experiences as listed by William James and how they affect the debate. There have also been some more recent attempts to break out of the debate by forming a compromise between the positions. I will present a brief overview of Randall Studstill's Mystical Pluralism as an example of such an attempt.

Perennialists attempt to reveal and prove the existence of a universal core behind all mystical experiences by identifying commonalities even between mystical experiences of

⁴² I have chosen to use the terms 'perennialism' and 'constructivism' for these particular positions regarding mystical experience. However, in the literature of mysticism perennialistic position has also been called by different terms such as 'non-constructivism', 'postconstructivism', 'decontextualism' and perhaps most prominently 'essentialism'. In general all these terms are identical or closely associated to a degree that the differences are reduced to mere connotations in regards to their focus on some specific aspect. Similarly, the 'constructivistic' position has been labeled for example as 'anti-essentialism' and 'contextualism' See for example Gellman 2014 and Studstill 2005: 2

⁴³ Rothberg 1997: 167

⁴⁴ It should be noted that If (1) is found to have a positive answer, it would necessarily follow that (2) would be at least partly answered positively. For the existence of a universal core behind mystical experiences of different mystics coming from different religio-cultural backgrounds certainly constitutes as a "veridical insight into certain aspects of reality" just by itself. The veracity of "mystical claims" becomes problematic when their relation to the actual experience is considered. I will attempt to deal with this problem later in this chapter.

mystics with different traditional and cultural backgrounds. Reports by mystics regarding their mystical experiences can differ widely between mystics coming from somewhat similar (for example being “theistic”) or even identical (for example Yogācāra, consciousness-only school of Buddhism) traditional background. These differences are even more pronounced between mystics coming from different societal traditions and eras. A central tenet of perennialism is the distinction drawn between the experience itself, which the perennialist believes to be one and the same among all mystics, and the interpretation of the experience where the mystic uses the conceptual framework of his/her socio-linguistic, religious and spiritual tradition in describing the experience.

Constructivists, in contrast, attempt to show that all experiences, including all so-called mystical experiences are not ‘pure’ experiences but instead a result of a complex cognitive framework that forms the very experience itself. In other words, perennialists defend the universality of the mystical experience as such, while acknowledging the presence of societal and cultural forces in shaping the post experience interpretation and description of those experiences. Constructivists, on the other hand, refuse to detach the mystical experience from the context in which it takes place. Instead, they believe that these psychological, societal and cultural forces are present already in shaping the mystical experience itself.

3.1. Constructivism

Forman gives a clear summary of the constructivist position:

According to this constructivist paradigm, all experiences— prosaic, religious, artistic, mystical—are in significant ways formed, shaped, mediated, and constructed by the terms, categories, beliefs, and linguistic backgrounds which the subject brings to them. This notion has become so dominant that it has taken on the status of a self-evident truism.⁴⁵

This self-evident truism is clearly visible in the article by Steven Katz entitled “*Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism*” (1978). The article has been a centerpiece in the debate

⁴⁵ Forman 1990: 4

between perennialism and constructivism. Katz begins his attack on perennialism by stating his “single epistemological assumption”:

There are NO pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences. Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, *all* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. The notion of unmediated experience seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty. This epistemological fact seems to me to be true, because of the sorts of beings we are, even with regard to the experiences of those ultimate objects of concern with which mystics have had intercourse, e.g., God, Being, nirvana, etc .⁴⁶

This “epistemological assumption” taken by Katz does answer question (1) (Is there a core mystical experience, a universal experience common to humans across cultures and traditions?) with a definite “NO”. At the same time, Katz’s constructivist critique of question (1) leaves the question (2) (Do mystical experiences give veridical insights into certain aspects of reality and into reality as a whole such that mystical claims should be accepted?) largely untouched. However, he does argue that it is impossible to verify mystical claims “if by verification we mean the strong thesis that independent grounds for the claimed event/experience can be publicly demonstrated.”⁴⁷ And from this it follows that:

[...] no veridical propositions can be generated on the basis of mystical experience. As a consequence it appears certain that mystical experience is not and logically cannot be the grounds for *any* final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position nor, more particularly, for any specific dogmatic or theological belief.⁴⁸

Katz does not provide any actually usable verification criteria for mystical experiences and does not even attempt to justify his decision to use a criteria (public demonstration) that by definition is at odds with the whole concept of mystical experiences.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Katz 1978: 26 emphasis in original

⁴⁷ Katz 1978: 22

⁴⁸ Katz 1978: 22

⁴⁹ He writes: “I will not try to justify this position here” Katz 1978: 22

Furthermore, he writes that “[...] no philosophical argument is capable of proving the veracity of mystical experience.”⁵⁰ I feel that under these premises it is not very productive to deal with Katz’s answer to Rothberg’s second question any further and instead focus on this self-evident truism itself that Katz and his fellow constructivists advocate. I will let Perennialism and their arguments challenge Katz later.

The constructivist paradigm as a self-evident truism is blatantly obvious with him since he does not seem to give any valid reason or justification for his epistemological assumption in his article. Without further discussion, he proceeds to describe various mystical teaching of different religions and how these teachings actually construct the mystical experience itself. I do not deny the merits of constructivism when it comes to the matter of cognition and its ordinary, non-mystical operation. I would even concede that there are fields of study where the self-evident truism is, indeed, well founded and deserved notion. However, in my opinion the most problematic assumption Katz and other constructivists like for example Wayne Proudfoot make is the inherent similarity between mystical and non-mystical experiences. They do not seem to feel the need to justify in any way how their constructivist paradigm also applies to mystical experiences. To apply this type of self-evident truism to something that is everything but self-evident and deals with matters and concepts completely different from normal experiences is troubling. And it is not just Katz and Proudfoot, but it seems to me that no matter what, constructivist paradigm is inherently incapable of acknowledging any kind of special status to mystical experiences and for their paradigm to be relevant, all experiences need to be conceptual in nature.

The unwarranted use of this self-evident truism by Katz has also been noted by many others, for example:

Forman: “Once he has assumed that language enters and, in part, shapes and constructs all experiences, the remaining thirty-nine pages of the article provides virtually no further argumentation but only instances of this assumption.”⁵¹

Philip Almond: “Katz seems to suggest that the relationship between a mystical experience and the context out of which it arises is a logically

⁵⁰ Katz 1978: 22

⁵¹ Forman 1990: 15-16

necessary one, that the mystic cannot but experience in contextually determined ways. While one can agree with Katz that there is a strong *contingent* correlation between a mystical experience and its context, he has not given us any reasons that the connection is a necessary one. Consequently, he has failed to show how the mystical experience is *constituted* by the religious traditions out of which it arose.”⁵²

Perovich: “Although no one would doubt that the latter empirical studies form the fundamental basis for assessing the resemblances and differences among the experiences described in testimonies within the various religious traditions, it is only on the assumption of the formative influence of tradition on experience that these reports, employing the language suited to their religious contexts, can be taken as evidence of the variety of mystical experience without further ado. Hence, it is the philosophical side of the attack on which the rejection of the thesis of the universal core here depends.”⁵³

Jones also notes this a priori nature of constructivist approach to mystical experience even if he focuses mainly on his own definition of depth-mystical experiences:

The only justification for constructivism is that it reflects the position most commonly accepted by philosophers concerning consciousness in non-mystical experiences ... However, constructivism was developed from nonmystical experiences without serious consideration of mystical experiences, and constructivists advance no independent arguments for why their theory must apply to all experiences, including depth-mystical experiences.⁵⁴

We have already seen that there are great many different ways that various authors have defined mystical experiences and in general the definitions themselves are in direct contrast to constructivism. But regardless of the particular definition that is being applied, mystical experiences are always considered to be very different from “normal”, non-mystical forms of conscious experiences. I feel that this particular characteristic of mystical experiences cannot be stressed enough when it comes to challenging constructivists claims regarding the logically necessary contextual nature of mystical

⁵² Almond 1990: 213

⁵³ Perovich 1990: 240

⁵⁴ Jones 1993: 9

experiences. Constructivists should somehow be able to move beyond their self-evident truism and show how mystical experiences actually are ordinary experiences despite their extraordinary characteristics. Furthermore, there are mystical experiences, including the depth-mystical experiences of Jones, which are defined to be free of all conscious content. Here, constructivism is left with the sole option to deny even the mere possibility for the existence of these experiences since it is impossible to construct experience that has no content to begin with. Before examining how ineffability and noetic quality affect the constructivist paradigm, I will take a closer look at these non-conceptual experiences.

3.1.1. Pure Conscious Events

Forman calls experiences empty of all content ‘Pure Conscious Events’ (“PCEs”) which are similar to experiences in Stace’s ‘introvertive mysticism’ and Jones’s ‘depth-mystical experiences’. He defines PCEs as “a wakeful though contentless (nonintentional) consciousness.”⁵⁵ PCE does not include any content, there is no object to be experienced nor is there subject that experiences. As Jones describes his depth-mystical experience:

The second type of mystical experience occurs when the mind is completely stilled. According to mystics, this state is not unconscious, but is in fact an intensely conscious state. There is no awareness of any object or of any content of any kind yet there is still a realization of an ultimate reality.⁵⁶

Without any experiential content there is no work for the constructivist type of cognition. In accordance with reports given by some mystics, it seems that the mystical experience can even include the dissolution of the “self” and there is no longer any distinction between the subject and the object present to be philosophically or otherwise analyzed, how can we apply anything, such as anything related to constructivism that is based on such a distinction, to the experience? My answer is that we, indeed, cannot. We can no longer consider the subject (the mystic) as someone who constructs the object (mystical

⁵⁵ Forman 1990: 8

⁵⁶ Jones 1993: 2

object, absolute reality, whatever it might be) in any way or form, since there is no longer anything that constructs nor are there any forms that can be constructed.

Forman describes his own PCE-experience as “unremarkable” but still considers it to be a proof for the existence of such experiences.⁵⁷ Studstill argues against Forman at this very point and points out that mystical experiences are supposed to be anything but as trivial as to be called “unremarkable”.⁵⁸ However, Forman’s own experience does not seem to be an actual mystical experience to begin with and he merely uses it as an example of an experience without any conscious content. As long as his experience was real and it was free from all content we can of course conclude that PCE is not sufficient characteristic to make experience mystical. Furthermore, he does provide examples of PCEs that similarly to Jones’ depth-mystical experience have “positive”⁵⁹ results and seem more akin to actual mystical experiences..

In my opinion Jones’ definition can be used as useful example of PCE as he takes it much further and is everything but unremarkable.⁶⁰ However, it does also mean that PCEs as such do not describe the whole experience but only one, even if crucial part of it. Gellman points out that “[...] reports of “emptying out” and “forgetting” may refer only to an emptying of ordinary experiential content, making room for an extraordinary content.”⁶¹ If this was the case, then constructivism that works under the naturalistic framework in explaining mystical experiences would be placed in a difficult position.

3.1.2. Ineffability and Constructivism

Ineffability is considered to not be just a defining characteristic of mystical experiences, but also something that is shared by all mystical experiences and thus paving way for the perennialist position. Constructivism needs to show that ineffability is not acceptable universal characteristic of mystical experience, and furthermore, if mystical experiences

⁵⁷ Forman 1990: 28

⁵⁸ Studstill 2005: 27

⁵⁹ This is an understatement, however, examples that Forman gives are not really ‘mystical’, but instead just highly positive experiences. They are presented more as an argument against constructivism in general as clearly unmediated experiences. See Forman 1990: 27-28

⁶⁰ Jones’ depth-mystical experience and Forman’s PCE are clearly not the same experience. But I feel that the similarity of them being without content makes the comparison valid.

⁶¹ Gellman 2014: para. 5.2

are 'ineffable', the constructivist position becomes difficult to sustain. William James describes ineffability:

The Subject of it immediately say that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect.⁶²

Constructivist have tried to argue away the problem presented by ineffability. For Katz, ineffability is not even an acceptable characteristic of mystical experience. According to him, calling mystical experience ineffable does not inform anything about the context of the experience and only acts to "cloak the experience from investigation", thus making it impossible to compare one mystical experience with another.⁶³ However, in my opinion Katz is only half correct and the cloak only prevents us from taking the descriptions given us by mystics themselves regarding their experiences to actually be unmediated descriptions. When virtually all mystics acknowledge that their descriptions do not, and indeed cannot describe the fullness of what was experienced one can quite confidently use the repeatedly declared ineffability to be a characteristic of mystical experiences.

Proudfoot, in his well-known work *Religious Experience* acknowledges that ineffability is widespread enough to deserve attention. According to him, ineffability is not part of the mystical experiences but something that is predetermined characteristic for the experience to be identified as a mystical experience (he actually refers to 'religious' experiences, but as his whole book is basically an argument against the possibility of unmediated experiences and because of his rather diluted notion of mystical experiences, he often uses the two interchangeably). To him the problem of ineffability is a logical one, and not something that is an inherent part of the experiences. He argues that ineffability is only to be seen as part of a particular "symbol system" and that "ineffability of an experience must result from its logical or grammatical component."⁶⁴ The main point he makes is that even if an experience is ineffable in regards to one symbol system, it could still be expressed via another system, chosen from a pool of "all linguistic

⁶² James 2002: 295

⁶³ Katz 1978: 54-55

⁶⁴ Proudfoot 1985: 125-126

schemes”.⁶⁵ This basically means that mystical experience, such as where no subject is present, or experience of unity where the self becomes part of totality of things is a simple matter of linguistic logic. This is quite a claim to make and something I see as impossible. It is his extremely diluted view of mystical experiences that makes it possible. It would be acceptable if he justified his constructivist position somehow, but like Katz, he does not. He only describes his position and presents it as a fact. Proudfoot⁶⁶ talks about experience of sunyata (emptiness), that I see as a classic example of a non-conceptual mystical experience; there are no concepts, there is no “I”, there is no “you” and there is no “there”. I wonder which non-symbolic system Proudfoot would choose from “all possible symbolic systems” to be able to describe the actual ineffability away.

William Alston, on the other hand, considers the whole topic of ineffability to have been “blown out of all proportion” and actually be rather irrelevant to mysticism. He believes that since mystics actually do proceed to describe their mystical experiences as something where they are aware of various features and activities of God as well as a variety of subjective features. Furthermore, he takes the common use of metaphors, analogies and symbolism of mystics’ descriptions to not point towards ineffability nor anything out of ordinary as they are also commonly applied to common experiences by non-divine, mundane necessities.⁶⁷ He attempts to prove this by pointing out how the similarities and differences of phenomenal qualia of mystical experiences parallel “to an important extent” with ordinary sensory qualia:

Touch, unlike seeing, involves a direct contact with the object; seeing reveals much more detail concerning the object and provides much more convincing view of its nature and identity. And some mystical perceptions involve a more intimate contact with God, while others reveal Him more fully.⁶⁸

He does make an interesting point. However, I feel that Alston fails to appreciate the “no adequate” –part of James’ definition. It is true that mystics indeed do use variety of

⁶⁵ Proudfoot 1985: 126

⁶⁶ Proudfoot 1985: 127. Proudfoot sees concepts such as Tao, Brahman and Sunyata having “logical function” that acts to enhance the experience itself (p.128 and 135-136). He does not elaborate on the grammatical and logical role of these ineffable concepts enough to make it clear what kind of symbol system could be used.

⁶⁷ Alston 1993: 32

⁶⁸ Alston 1993: 51-52

languages and proceed to write whole books about supposedly ineffable experiences. However, if my argument against Proudfoot is valid, it can also be used to argue against Alston here. No amount of words or symbols from all the possible language and symbol systems are capable of adequately describing the experience. It is possible to say that mystical descriptions such as “I saw God in Timeless Depth of Becoming” or “The Heavenly Pleroma sang to me of the Glory of the Unbegotten One” do tell us something, but the experience itself that prompted the mystic to use such words certainly takes a significant part of it beyond the core structures that our concepts and ordinary experiences are depending on. Furthermore, Alston fail to acknowledge the essential difference between the mystical experience and its interpretation, a matter which I will later examine in more depth with perennialism.

3.1.3. Noetic Quality and Constructivism

For James, the noetic quality of mystical experience is the other main defining characteristic and also something that is shared by all mystical experiences:

Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.⁶⁹

Noetic quality acts to verify the experience itself to the mystic. Mystic *knows* that he is encountering the mystical object and that it is something other than a mere construct of his/her cognitive faculties. If James’ definition is correct and mystical experiences are “unplumbed by discursive intellect,” the intellectual space for the constructivist paradigm to work its mental constructions is further narrowed. Even if we give ground to constructivists and doubt the actuality of James’ claim about the total absence of discursive intellect, it seems that we cannot doubt that whatever power and work remains

⁶⁹ James 2002: 295

for the discursive intellect during mystical experiences, has to work with something very foreign, totally other to itself. In my view, it remains reasonable to doubt the compatibility of the concepts required by constructivist consciousness with the concepts or non-concepts given during the mystical experience. It similarly seems reasonable to acknowledge the likelihood or at the very least a possibility that mystical experiences are formed differently from normal experiences, thus casting serious doubt into the very basis for the whole constructivist paradigm.

Katz argues against James' notion that the noetic quality would provide a source for commonality between mystical experiences. According to him James "fails to recognize both the variety of 'insights' one could have into the 'depths of truth' and the variety of 'truths' which can lurk in these depths waiting to be 'plumbed'."⁷⁰ Katz's argument is not surprising and follows logically from his denial of the ineffable nature of mystical experiences. If ineffability is part of mystical experiences it would be quite surprising if there existed some universal conformity between mystics' interpretations of such details of their experiences. However, as we shall later see, there actually is a conformity on a more general level which will act against Katz and his constructivist peers.

Instead of focusing whether 'truths' inherent in the James' noetic quality can be compared between different mystical experiences, Proudfoot argues that similarly to ineffability, noetic quality is a predetermined condition of the experience that shapes it. Mystic is "fully steeped in the attitudes and beliefs of his tradition."⁷¹ These attitudes and beliefs also require the mystic to judge his/her experience as noetic, as a "conceptual constraint on what experiences may be identified as mystical."⁷² My argument against Proudfoot regarding ineffability can also be applied against his understanding of the noetic quality. His diluted concept of mysticism and also of noetic quality is further proven as he later makes a strange claim about James' use of noetic quality: "Ordinary perceptual judgments include an epistemic component. This is what James refers to as the noetic quality of religious experience."⁷³ Explanation for this claim is found on notes: "James refers to the noetic quality in mystical experience, but he regards mysticism as the name for the special manner in which religious persons have professed to see the truth. It is not restricted to a

⁷⁰ Katz 1978: 49

⁷¹ Proudfoot 1985: 137

⁷² Proudfoot 1985: 148

⁷³ Proudfoot 1985: 170

narrow view of mystical experience.”⁷⁴ The referred page from James says: “Religious persons have often, though not uniformly, professed to see truth in a special manner. That manner is known as mysticism.”⁷⁵ He seems to misunderstand James by quite a huge margin. The actual concept of noetic quality as quoted above clearly shows James’ to consider it as something that is not related to ordinary “judgments” as Proudfoot would like to think, even if it would be required for his constructivist theory to hold.⁷⁶

In the end consciousness remains as a mystery. Certainly we have many theories trying to explain its parts or even the whole of it, but there is no all-encompassing “explanation of consciousness” that might make the constructivist position more laudable. Still, it is very human to claim that we know things for certain and even if we do not have the whole picture we still know enough to make all kinds of claims based on incomplete theories. This is all good and well in most cases and most scientific fields recognize their flaws, but when it comes to grand topics such as consciousness and universe, we can see from the history of science that paradigm shifts are not uncommon and always merciless to such attempts.

Constructivism, which I by now consider to be buried in regards to this debate, can still certainly play a useful and meaningful role when dealing with recounting post-mystical experiences. However, as I see it, any attempt by constructivism to reach out to the mystical experience itself can only result in yes-no-yes-no argument powered by stubbornness based on a dogmatic world view that forces definitions on mystical experiences that remain ill-fitted. However, even if constructivist argument is not capable of achieving its aims, the perennialists have yet to validate their own views.

⁷⁴ Proudfoot 1985: 246-247

⁷⁵ James 2002: 293

⁷⁶ It seems to me that constructivism just from its most basic premises becomes “theory-laden” as there has to be something that is construed and some kind of theory by which the constructing of consciousness and experiences takes place. There are of course wide variety of “naturalistic explanations” available but while Proudfoot is applying his version of these kind of naturalistic explanations he at the same time interprets everything through this explanation and every concept becomes something that he can apply. However, in so doing the original definitions become diluted and in the case of Proudfoot, he is not really talking about mystical experiences but more about the language and grammar that is used to describe his diluted version of them.

3.2. Perennialism

PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS - the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing - the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being - the thing is immemorial and universal.

—Aldous Huxley “The Perennial Philosophy”

Perennialists believe that there is a universal core to be found behind mystical experiences. If perennialism has it right, that such a universal core of mysticism indeed exists, it would then not only have great epistemological meaning regarding how we understood the phenomenon of mystical experiences and to some extent consciousness in general. But also, albeit requiring bit of a soteriological leap, it could also have immense ontological ramifications if the universal core was what the mystics themselves claim it to be—Absolute Reality. However, under the obfuscating veil of ineffability it is no easy task.

William James expresses his perennialistic view with fervor I feel is well deserved considering the scale and potential implications of the topic:

This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old.⁷⁷

One of the perennialists’ main methods in trying to show the existence of this “recurring note”; the universal core behind all mystical experiences is to seek similarities, some

⁷⁷ James 2002: 324-325

“eternal unanimity” in the reports shared by mystics regarding their experiences. This method can, and indeed does, reveal something about mystical experiences. One can discover similarities and at the very least these similarities can further the study and understanding of mystical experiences through categories and aspects that are revealed through them.

3.2.1. Ineffability and Perennialism

As was the case with constructivists, perennialists also face and need to acknowledge the ineffability of mystical experiences and the problems it brings to understanding descriptions of mystical experiences by the mystics. Stace acknowledges the problem regarding ineffability of mystical experiences: “There is the difficulty that mystics usually say that their experiences are ineffable, incommunicable, and indescribable; after which they quite commonly proceed to describe them. What are we to make of this?”⁷⁸

Stace argues that the problem of ineffability consist of two separate problems that need to be distinguished from each other to make the problem solvable. First problem is whether words and concepts can be applied during the mystical experience and second problem is whether they can be applied after the experience has occurred and it is remembered. Stace answers the first problem with a definite ‘no’: “Mystical experience, *during* the experience, is wholly unconceptualizable and therefore wholly unspeakable. This *must* be so. You cannot have concept of anything *within* the undifferentiated unity because there are no separate items to be conceptualized.”⁷⁹ After the mystical experience is over and the mystic is back in “ordinary sensory-intellectual consciousness”, s/he is capable of remembering and conceptualizing the memories of his/her experience. It becomes possible to contrast the ordinary experience of remembering with the mystical experience and “speak of an experience as “undifferentiated,” as “unity”, as “mystical,” as “empty,” as “void,” and so on”.⁸⁰

Stace does acknowledge that mystics themselves find it difficult to conceptualize and put into words their mystical experience even after the experience, but points out that the

⁷⁸ Stace 1961: 55

⁷⁹ Stace 1961: 297 emphasis in original

⁸⁰ Stace 1961: 297

mystics actually do proceed to describe their experiences. Thus, according to Stace, their description must be capable of at least partially capturing some truth regarding the mystical experience itself:

For either he does succeed in communicating at least *some part of the truth about his experience*, or his words are no better than a sound of escaping steam. If he does successfully communicate the truth about a part of his remembered experience, however small that part may be, then he must have given a *true description of that part of his experience*. And in that case he must be mistaken when he supposes that no language can ever apply to remembered mystical experience.⁸¹

The problem is certainly not completely gone and depending on how “adequate” is understood, still in accordance with James’ definition of ineffability. It is clear that “some part of the truth” is not enough to contain the actual experience in full. After having established that there exists some connection between the actual and remembered experience Stace continues to examine the actual language used by mystics in their recollections. In contrast to Alston’s view presented earlier, he points out how there are several concepts being used by mystics to describe their experiences that are by no means metaphorical or symbolic but instead sound like literal descriptions.⁸² As an example, he uses John of Ruysbroeck:⁸³:

Ruysbroeck writes of the introvertive experience as "the darkness in which all lovers lose themselves." In general, "darkness" and "silence" are among the commonest of all metaphors used by mystics. Ruysbroeck's "darkness in which all lovers lose themselves" is a metaphor for what in his own language is elsewhere called the "undifferentiated unity." But "undifferentiated unity" is not in turn a metaphor for anything else. It has all the marks of literal language.⁸⁴

In my opinion Stace makes a convincing argument. Remembered mystical experience is able to reveal a small part of the actual experience. Also, the language that the mystics

⁸¹ Stace 1961: 298 emphasis added

⁸² Stace 1961: 299-300

⁸³ 13th - 14th century Flemish mystic

⁸⁴ Stace 1961: 300

use contain literal descriptions of their memory and can be used by perennialists to further their search and understanding of the universal core of mystical experiences. However, ineffability has not disappeared and in my opinion this is the place for the constructivist paradigm to shine. Mystics who often are part of well-defined traditions certainly use their respective language and concepts that need to be analyzed to gain full benefit of Stace's approach.

In the beginning of his book Stace presents two questions he sets out to answer. These questions are basically reworded versions of the two questions that were posed at the beginning of our own inquiry into this debate between perennialism and constructivism:

1. Is there any set of characteristics, which is common to all mystical experiences, and distinguishes them from other kinds of experience, and thus constitutes their universal core?
2. If there is such a universal core, is the argument for objectivity which has been based upon it a valid argument?⁸⁵

To begin answering these questions, Stace states that "there is only one way of doing this. We must quote a number of representative descriptions of their experiences which have been given by mystics, taking them from all historical times, places, and cultures, as widely separated as possible; and by an examination of these descriptions we must try to arrive inductively at their common characteristics, if there are any."⁸⁶ Stace proceeds to do such that and based on his analyses of mystics descriptions of their experiences he lists characteristics for both introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences. Stace's own list for the common characteristics for introvertive and extrovertive mystical experience was already presented in the third chapter. To remind us of this earlier discussion, and to provide a helpful comparison, we can examine a similar list based on Stace's one that can be found from Rowe.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Stace 1961: 43

⁸⁶ Stace 1961: 45

⁸⁷ Rowe 2007: 79

Extrovertive mystical experience:

1. Looks outward through the senses
2. Sees the inner essence of things, an essence which appears to be alive, beautiful, and the same in all things
3. Sense of unions of one's deeper self with this inner essence
4. Feeling that what is experienced is divine
5. Sense of reality, that one sees things as they really are
6. Sense of peace and bliss
7. Timelessness, no awareness of the passage of time during experience

Introvertive mystical experience:

1. A state of consciousness devoid of its ordinary contents: sensations, images, thoughts, desires, and so forth
2. An experience of absolute oneness, with no distinctions or divisions
3. Sense of reality, that one is experiencing what is ultimately real
4. Feeling that what is experienced is divine
5. Sense of complete peace and bliss
6. Timelessness, no awareness of the passage of time during the experience

Similarly Happold, in a support of perennialistic view, finds four similarities that instead of referring to the defining characteristics of mystical experiences themselves, can be asserted from the more broad reflections of them by the mystics from "all ages", "all parts of the worlds" and "all religions":⁸⁸

1. This phenomenal world of matter and individual consciousness is only a partial reality and is the manifestation of a Divine Ground in which all partial realities have their being.
2. It is of the nature of man that not only can he have knowledge of this Divine Ground by inference, but also he can realize it by direct intuition, superior to discursive reason, in which the knower is in some way united with the known.
3. The nature of man is not a single but a dual one. He has not one but two selves, the phenomenal ego, of which he is chiefly conscious and which he tends to regard as his true self, and non-phenomenal, eternal self, an inner man, the spirit, the spark of divinity within him, which is his true self. It is

⁸⁸ Happold 1990: 20

possible for a man, if he so desires and is prepared to make the necessary effort, to identify himself with his true self and so with the Divine Ground, which is of the same or like nature.

4. It is the chief end of man's earthly existence to discover and identify himself with his true self. By so doing, he will come to an intuitive knowledge of the Divine Ground and so apprehend Truth as it really is, and not as to our limited human perceptions it appears to be. Not only that, he will enter into a state of being which has been given different names, eternal life, salvation, enlightenment, etc."

In my opinion perennialism makes a very convincing case. Mystical experiences seem to form a unique group of experiences. Not only does Stace show that mystical experiences contain recurring characteristics that seem to be wholly ignorant of the self-evident truism of constructivism. Similarly, I find Happold's arguments regarding unity of broader aspects of mysticism to be well founded, even if his points might be seen somewhat differently by various mystical traditions and by scholars of mysticism. In my opinion the possible conceptual differences result from traditional details and ineffability, and would be resolved in mystical experience and that is what matters.

3.3. Mystical Pluralism

The third option is a combination of both perennialistic and constructivist views presented by Randall Studstill in his book *Unity of Mystical Traditions*. He sees that the debate and the related study of mysticism "is at an impasse" and that "no one has been able to formulate an argument sufficiently compelling to persuade anyone but the already-converted."⁸⁹ The main thesis of mystical pluralism is that different mystical traditions and practices function in similar ways and all mystics go through essentially the same transformative process.⁹⁰ However, going against perennialistic position, the phenomenological content of the different mystical experiences is not seen as identical. According to Studstill, mystical experiences are "more or less mediated by the conceptual belief system of the mystic."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Studstill 2005: 5

⁹⁰ Studstill 2005: 5-6

⁹¹ Studstill 2005: 9

However, he does regard “most advanced stage of mystical realization” as an exception that in my opinion makes mystical pluralism part of perennialism rather than any actual alternative.⁹² As I see it, the entire perennialistic position is built on these most advanced mystical realizations and from their point of view these ‘less advanced’ experiences are not even essential part of the debate. What Studstill is proposing is not an actual compromise to the ongoing debate, but instead a completely new debate that incorporates a broader definition for mystical experiences. The lower categories of mystical experiences would remain the domain of constructivists whereas the higher category would be reserved solely for the perennialists. I trust that perennialists would likely welcome Studstill’s mystical pluralism as they could just ignore any lower forms of mystical experiences and just keep on doing what they have been doing all along. Constructivists on the other hand, would most certainly refuse this categorization as the possibility for unmediated experiences is still present.

In my opinion, mystical pluralism does provide a feasible approach, but it does not manage to separate itself from perennialism and in the end does not work as a viable third alternative. Studstill himself seems to mostly ignore the highest form of mystical realization and, consequently, as a compromise between perennialism and constructivism mystical pluralism does not really work.⁹³

3.4. In Conclusion

There is a lot at stake in the debate between perennialism and constructivism. The approaches and implications of their premises take the whole topic of mysticism and mystical experiences to absolutely opposite directions. Constructivism sees mystical experiences being no different from ordinary experiences at their core and promote naturalistic interpretations as the only valid approach to mysticism. Perennialism, on the other hand, sees mysticism as a separate and unique field of study. They attempt to face the mystical experiences at the same level as the mystics themselves and in the end implicating more or less directly that mystical experiences possess at least some truth

⁹² Studstill 2005: 9

⁹³ I do not want to diminish the value of Studstill’s mystical pluralism, but since the focus of this thesis is in the higher echelon of mystical experiences, it is not plausible for me to widen the definition of mystical experiences to an extent that would fully accommodate mystical pluralism.

value even to non-mystics, and the universal core behind the experiences is a valid object for philosophical inquiries. I believe that I have effectively shown that constructivism and their naturalistic approach has no other grounds besides their self-declared, ideologically based self-evident truism. Perennialism on the other hand clearly shows that mystical experiences do deserve to be regarded as a phenomena outside of the naturalistic framework. Furthermore, and in my opinion most importantly, perennialism justifies the notion that *something* is answering the mystics' calls. Something, *the mystical Core*, is.

In my opinion, perennialism has succeeded well in establishing the existence of universal core behind mystical experiences. However, I do not think that they have managed to convincingly show anything about this universal core besides that it is there. The uniformity of experiences is undeniable and something is reacting to the mystics' calls. This is no small achievement. Perennialism does show us that mystical experiences form a special group of experiences that is totally other and outside of the realm of ordinary consciousness, i.e. perennialism validates the existence of mystical experience as an actual phenomenon that is incommensurable with ordinary experiences and should be treated as such. Even if the mystics themselves have a clear advantage over the rest of us concerning its nature, it is thanks to perennialism that we are in a better position to discover something of its nature based on the many men and women who have attained the mystical heights and come back to share their encounter.

When dealing with experiences of any kind from different periods, lands and cultures the constructivist paradigm should not, and cannot, be ignored. As I have already acknowledged, the constructivist paradigm does have a major, if not definitive, role when dealing with normal, non-mystical experiences. Constructivism also plays a role in how the mystics reflect and report their mystical experience after the experience itself. I believe that when describing the mystical experience, a vast gap of ineffability remains between the actual content of mystical experience (filled with concepts and non-concepts foreign to the conceptual scheme of the describing mind) and the attempts to recapture it by words afterwards. The absolute oneness of one mystic remains ever separated from the absolute oneness of the other when attempting to gain definite hold of the universal core perennialists are after.

However, even if I find that the ineffability and the total otherness of the concepts and non-concepts encountered during mystical experiences prevent definite characterizations of the potential universal core behind them, I do believe that it would be foolish to ignore

the common elements that all mystical experiences share. These commonalities exist even though these experiences that can be defined in many ways have appeared in different periods, lands and cultures. There is something clearly there and no leap of faith, soteriological or intellectual should be required to see it. Something is and has been answering to the calls of truth seeking mind of mystics with these peculiar and elusive group of experiences grouped under the notion of being “mystical.”

On matter of the scale and uniqueness of mystical experiences one should look for possibilities (perennialism) instead of impossibilities (constructivism). Via negativa is a powerful path, but cutting too many routes one risks ending up in in dead end with nowhere to go expect back, and that requires admittance of failure which is not too common in academic, nor religious circles. Building on this perennialist premise of “something is there”, in the next chapter I will attempt to get a hold of this something, this *object* of mystical experiences.

4. THE MYSTICAL OBJECT

Perennialism by itself is not capable in establishing any definitive details about the object of the mystical experience. I believe it would be a mistake to use characteristics of mystical experiences as those given by Stace as concrete descriptions of the mystical object itself. These descriptions certainly can help in the search for the nature of the mystical object but to call it “oneness” or “absolute” based on the mystics’ descriptions is not without problems and in the end, does not reveal anything beyond what the various definitions for mystical experiences have been telling us all this time. However, I feel that perennialism does validate mystical experiences as an actual phenomenon occurring outside of ordinary cognitive faculties and that mystics do encounter something in their visions. This also validates and begs the question of what it is that the mystics encounter; what is it that gives rise to these experiences, what is the object of the mystical experience.

4.1. The Other

What is the *object* of mystical experience? It has been called “Fundamental Reality”, “The One”, “God”, “The Truth” and by many other names. I have decided to call it *The Other*.⁹⁴ The Other, to me, reflects well the nature of this otherworldly object of mystical experience, which by its very nature is totally different, totally other from the objects of normal, non-mystical experiences. In my view, we as human beings are not just prisoners inside the conceptual cage of our cognition but we are also bound by the framework that comes with the physical nature of our world as well as our biological existence with its functions and limitations. The Other, the source and object of the mystic visions, transcends everything that resides on this physical side of the cloud of unknowing. It lies outside and above the mental cage of our conceptual prison that seems to prevent us from reaching it. The Other is not “here”.

⁹⁴ Ninian Smart has used the term “Other” when describing religious experiences. His usage of the term is broader than my usage in this study where it is limited to the mystical object of true mystical experiences.

Object cannot really get any more elusive than the object of mystical experiences. It eludes not just the physically grounded concepts we possess but it also entails that even the knowledge we can have about it within and through mystical experience eludes the conceptual framework of our ordinary, non-mystical cognition. It appears that during the mystical experience the mystic him/herself is able to reach this elusive object—The Other—and in some mystical way this contact also possesses noetic qualities leaving no room for doubt in the mystic regarding the actuality of the encounter. This is the core of acquiring mystical knowledge, leaving us non-mystics with a problem of how to evaluate and validate this type of knowledge that is only fully accessible to mystics themselves.

Before attempting to gain some form of understanding of the Other, I believe it is useful to begin by examining the implications rising out of perennialism as part of our effort to reach out towards the Other. As stated—and hopefully adequately justified—in previous chapter, I find that there is at least some truth behind the perennialistic position. *Something* truly is *somewhere*, allowing and giving rise to these types of experiences that we call mystical. The truth of perennialism, even when stripped to its most bare form gives us a base from which to proceed first towards the world and ourselves in light of mysticism and with some reservation towards the Other itself.

Happold presents us with *two fundamental convictions* that perennialism rests on:⁹⁵

1. Though it may be to a great extent atrophied and exist only potentially in most men, men possess an organ or faculty which is capable of discerning spiritual truth, and, in its own spheres, this faculty is as much to be relied on as are other organs of sensation in theirs.
2. In order to be able to discern spiritual truth men must in their essential nature be spiritual; in order to know That which they call God, they must be, in some way, partakers of the divine nature; potentially at least there must be some kinship between God and the human soul.

I see no reason not to agree with Happold on the first one. Mystical experiences as an actually existing phenomenon mean that there is something in the mystic, something in their being that gives rise to and makes mystical experiences possible. Happold's second conviction is already very close to concepts outside of our normal conceptual scheme.

⁹⁵Happold 1990: 21

This is evidenced by his references to vague concepts including “some way” and “some kinship”, which seem to acknowledge and respect the deep gulf between us and the Other. However, the necessary vagueness does not diminish the fact that it seems that there, indeed, has to exist some connection, even if its nature happens to be ineffable, between us, or at the very least between mystics during their mystical experience and the Other.

Most mystics come from some specific religious and cultural tradition. These traditions again tend to come with a vast and specific set of doctrines and teachings regarding the nature of the God(s), Ultimate Reality and whatever beings or states of being and existence happen to be embedded at the top of their respective existential hierarchies. Religious doctrines make various claims with varying reservations regarding not just the nature of the fundamental reality but also the role of humans and their relation to such reality. With this in mind, to proceed, we need to ask the obvious question:

Is there a possible or even necessary connection between the religious truths and the truth of the Other revealed to mystic during the mystical experience?

I believe that even if mystics, who are coming from different religions and traditions, actually connect and experience the same fundamental object, it would not necessarily mean that their religious doctrines and teaching are correct and true even including doctrines and teaching that these different religions and traditions share. Neither do I believe that perennialism immediately should lead us to deny the teachings and doctrines that are not universal between traditions. But it is important to recognize the overlap between different religious texts and mystical experiences. There are some teachings found in different religions and more particularly in their religious texts that seem to be directly related to mystical experiences and mystical claims.

It is no big surprise that religions incorporate numerous mystical elements in their teachings. It seems only natural that absolutes, with which mysticism so closely deals with, are also necessary elements when it comes to belief about fundamental states of being and existence which are essential and regular subject-matters for religions. God or some being or state of being is typically placed at the top of the existential hierarchy of any tradition. This entails that this highest state of being is not supposed to have anything above it, which leads to the deployment of descriptive concepts, which are also particular to mysticism.

I am not in a position to speculate how mystics and mystical experiences might have acted in forming many religious doctrines but it seems reasonable to assume that religious thought and mystical thought are often somehow related, mysticism only goes further, beyond mere doctrines that tend to form the non-mystical soteriological limit. This is not to say that I believe this relation to be necessary one. I take this view, firstly, because different religious backgrounds do not seem to determine the mystical experience itself, as we have learned from perennialism. Secondly, there are cases of mystics that are not deeply, if at all, indoctrinated to any specific religious system. Thirdly, there are many examples of mystics whose visions reveal truths that seem to go directly against the doctrines of their own traditions.

What I believe to be the core necessity to reach mystical experience is a belief in the existence of the Other, a belief that one can gain access to it and, lastly and most importantly, a deep desire to experience it. A belief into the existence of the Other and desire to reach an experience involving the Other are things that are often encouraged by religious and spiritual traditions. However, in religious traditions the desire to be closer to (and even experience) the Other is typically not understood as a direct experience of the divine but as something less mystical and more faith-based and faith-affirming in nature.

However, most mystics whose experiences have reached literature do stem from one religious tradition or another; something that must not be overlooked. Detailed overview of religious thought in different religions is outside the scope of this study, but it seems clear that religiosity, at least on some level acts to inspire and accommodate mystical pursuits regardless of specific doctrines. Most mystics seem to have gone through tremendous effort to reach the state of being where they are able to achieve mystical experience of the Other. But there are also cases where mystical experience seems to reflect a spontaneous reaction rather than be a result of a deliberate mental effort. This suggests that it may be possible that the desire or some closely related emotion by itself is enough to gain access to the Other.

4.2. Divine Point of View

When considering the characteristics and attributes of the Other, it seems that philosophers and theologians alike often seem to mix the human and what I like to call the divine point of view. For example, the very theistic notion of God inevitably being ultimately morally good seems to rely on a very questionable, even if it is doctrinally based assumption that God and humans share a view on morality that is comparable. No matter if God created mankind to reflect his image (whatever myriad things that can mean), our human morality is hardly absolute as anyone can notice at his or her first glance of humanity. Certainly humans, who generally tend to value their lives and existence as meaningful and important, no doubt view such things as violence towards, or causing the death of, a fellow human being, as morally wrong. The purpose of this study is not to explore and declare what morality actually is. But morality as a concept offers us a good example of how the religious and even philosophical background framework of the subject can force unnecessary attributes to the object of the mystical experience, to the Other. From the divine point of view, one lifespan and its ending (be it untimely or not) could very well be “seen” as absolutely meaningless. I believe we should at the very least assume, if not declare, the incommensurability between human and divine point of views.

When we talk about knowledge or cognitive functions of any kind or form, we must not assume that the divine point of view—the divine way of knowing and understanding—is in any way similar to human way of knowing and understanding. When considering the nature of the Other, the attributes and concept we use to define it have to always be considered primarily from the divine point of view as the human point of view can only act as a sort of a practical supplement but not as a truth-giving position. The mystical experiences themselves should make this very clear. They are called mystical for just this very reason that they are not ordinary, not even familiar to/with ordinary, and not capable of being captured by a normal human cognition.

The ineffability of mystical experiences is a clear example of this. From human point of view, we experience something that we are in the end, incapable of fully describing using our (human) point of view. That is, using conceptual scheme available for, and limited to, human cognitive capabilities. To truly know absolutes you have to become absolute

yourself. This might, indeed, be possible during a moment of mystical experience when the human point of view with its subject–object separation, along with other limiting factors are no longer present, and the experience is possibly similar or at least no longer incommensurable to that of a divine point of view. Absolutes are only fully known to absolute minds. It is a great and unfortunately very common misconception, even arrogance, in humans to declare anything else. Happold approaches this topic in a similar way through the concept of union commonly present in Christian mysticism:⁹⁶

This other kind of knowledge is based on something which can only be called 'union'. The more subject and object, the observer and that which is observed, merge into each other, that is, are 'united' with each other, the more profound and illuminating the knowledge becomes; and the less it becomes capable of description. The knowledge we may have of God is knowledge of this sort; but it goes beyond it; for God can only be fully known by *becoming* God, by taking Him into the inmost self as the fulfillment of that self, and by the self's being taken fully into the divine life and being transformed therein.

It is clear that the type knowledge we are reaching out for here is ultimately beyond normal means available to ordinary and non-mystical cognition, but it is not my intent to claim that only mystics are allowed to understand anything at all about the Other. The mystical experience itself, and direct awareness and knowledge gained during it, certainly is solely the domain of mystics. However, we who remain outside these experiences can still reach out towards the Other, its nature and its meaning.

There are two common ways that have been used to approach and attempt to understand and say something about the nature of the God (the Other): via negativa (way of negation) of apophatic theology and way of affirmation of kataphatic theology. The apophatic theology approaches the Other by attributes it does not have. It is an attempt to understand the God by understanding what it is not. This can be contrasted with kataphatic theology, where God is approached using positive terminology. An example of an apophatic approach would be to say that God is not evil or that God is not created. In contrast, Kataphatic theology can, for example, make a claim that God is love. These claims are based on scriptures and other teachings based on the religion and tradition in question. In mysticism there is a similar division between apophatic and kataphatic mysticism.

⁹⁶ Happold 1990: 62

Apophatic mysticism focuses on the ineffability of mystical experiences. In the end, it declares that nothing can be said about the Other, the object of the mystical experience. In contrast, kataphatic mysticism makes claims about the object of mystical experiences, such as God is All in one and One in all.⁹⁷

When examining the nature of the mystical object I have decided to seek its potential and necessary attributes without taking any ready-made definitions from any existing theology or school of thought for granted, whether mystical or not. As per apophatic mysticism we must acknowledge the ever present ineffability of mystical experiences. And in the spirit kataphatic mysticism we must also acknowledge that even if mystical experiences can never be adequately described they do seem to also contain some universality as perennialists have shown.

4.3. Attributes of the Other

As said, I see no reason to limit myself to any specific theology when trying to say what The Other is, can be, could be or has to be. However, I will have to make the assumption that *the Other is* and its being is fundamental as it is not caused by anything what I would call common or explainable through normal (non-mystical) rules of causality. I will also assume, even if I have already provided supporting evidence for it in my discussions on perennialism, that The Other (or at least parts of it) can be experienced and has been experienced in the mystical visions of the mystics throughout the history.

What is actually known in mystical vision, what is its object? This is a relatively easy question if and when you come from some specific tradition or theology that has an existing framework on where and how to place this fundamental being, state, reality or whatever it might be in that particular tradition. I feel that it is necessary not to assume any sort of ready-made conceptual-religious-spiritual premise, as there are plenty of variations out there, ranging from the theistic to pantheistic kinds. However, I do believe that it can be productive to compare and contrast mysticism and its object to traditional and existing religious thoughts and concepts of the divine.

⁹⁷ Gellman 2014 Stanford Encyclopedia on Philosophy: Mysticism paragraph 2.4.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism>

I will next attempt to examine and contrast some attributes common to theistic God with mysticism with the goal of illuminating whether and how they relate to the possible and necessary attributes of the Other, while trying to acknowledge the limitations of the human point of view and the otherness of the divine point of view.

4.3.1. Is It?

To begin our inquiry into the attributes of the Other, I will present St. Anselm's idea about God being self-existent:⁹⁸

Anselm saw 3 categories for everything that exists.

- (a) things that are explained by another
- (b) Things that are self-explaining
- (c) Things that are explained by nothing.

According to Anselm (a) is not good enough for God. It is the same for our subject matter, the Other, as there exists no "another" for it. At first glance, (c) is also not possible for everything needs to have a reason for its existence. I do agree with the notion but in the case of the Other, the "nothing" would have to be the "nothing" of the divine point of view. That leaves (b), and with the help of Anselm I will accept it to be part of the fundamental reality, part of the Other. It could also be that from the divine point of view (b) and (c) are one and the same. I would not be surprised to hear a mystic say "Divine nothing is Everything it is" or something similar. However (b) remains as something we can at least try to understand non-mystically.

What it actually means for something to be self-explaining is more difficult, for now I will limit its meaning to just mean that the Other does not belong to things described in (a) and (c) as far as human point of view allows it. I do not have the confidence to take a leap of faith into concluding what self-explaining could mean to the Other, as I believe it would necessarily require divine point of view to be successful. However, I do feel

⁹⁸ Rowe 2007: 11

confident to say that the self-explaining indeed requires divine causality, that is, concepts only available to divine, absolute mind.

The assumption that the mystical experiences are true and that they are actually experiences of a fundamental reality leads to first necessary attribute of the Other. *The Other is something that is able to be experienced.* Given this, there must be a connection between the mystic and the Other consistent with Happold's first fundamental conviction for perennialism. But the detailed and all-encompassing nature of this connection manages to elude the grasp of pure reasoning as it is even capable of disintegrating the subject-object dichotomy of the experience. This, I believe, is well reflected by the vagueness of Happold's second fundamental conviction. But it is not to say that reason cannot say anything about it. From the fact that the Other can be experienced we can reason that it exists, even if the precise mode of its existence seems to be beyond and above our human point of view, our conceptual framework to capture the depth and the nuance of the experience with the Other. However I believe that even if we have to add the vagueness of "some way" as a mode of existence, it is still a very powerful statement. To me "*The Other exists*" is true conclusion. When we strip the concept of 'existing' to its barest form possible, it cannot be attributed to anything else except that it is. We cannot give it any other meaning, shape or form.

Of course I am assuming that the mystical experience is a real phenomenon and that something in the mystics does, indeed, come in contact with the fundamental reality. I am, however, convinced that the truth of perennialism—to the extent I have shown it—gives reason enough to justify the assumption. I feel it is important to try to see what the object of their experience could be, or has to be, what the necessary and possible attributes of the Other can be—besides the necessity of 'potentiality of being experienced'.

When we acknowledge the possibility for noetic clues regarding the nature of the Other given us by mystics throughout the ages, and the necessity to separate the human and divine point of views—together with the need to ignore the revelatory and dogmatic nature of the theological concepts for the divine—we can apply our human point of view regarding the widely accepted attributes of the God. This human point of view must be, and effectively is, humble in a sense that it acknowledges the distance between our normal cognitive capabilities and the ineffable realms of the Other. When our concepts are not capable of reaching it, we have to cherish that as a one concrete fact we can use to understand our own position.

4.3.2. Omnibenevolence and Omniscience

The God of the Old Testament is a very active, and obviously cognitively active, being. It does things, it wants things and it even gets angry at times raining fire and brimstone upon those who he is displeased with when he does not get what he wants. Clearly it is a being with a consciousness and human like cognitive activity of some sort. But is it necessary for the Other to have consciousness and cognitive activity? First we must remember that our understanding of consciousness and cognition come from the human point of view and should not be applied to match that of the divine point of view without careful consideration and at the very least acknowledging the difference between the two.

What it would mean for The Other to know something? What it would mean for something that is Absolute to think about anything? If what is experienced during mystical experience is any hint to the cognitive mode of the absolute being, we can pretty much give up trying to get hold of it non-mystically. There is little we can say about a reality apprehending cognition. We can, of course, say that there indeed is very little, if anything, we can possibly say about it. We can also conclude that if the Other is aware of everything, if it is omniscient, the mode of the Other's knowing differs from any type of knowing we can apprehend using the concepts available to us. It is certainly possible to make assumptions and speculate about divine cognition, but I believe it can be conclusively said that omniscience as it can be understood through our human point of view with its conceptual limitations is not necessary attribute for the Other.

Our inability to comprehend divine cognition with our human conceptual scheme also means that it is impossible for us to fully understand divine morality. In scriptures we can read about rules and guidelines that tell a tale of a God with human like morality or at the very least morality we can comprehend, but how could such a being share our concepts when it comes to questions of morality? I claim it cannot. We should also not force our own morality to it when trying to understand the nature of such a being. Most moral and ethical questions rely on the temporal nature of the existence of us humans and the world surrounding us, focusing on our actions and their consequences. However, a being whose existence at least potentially lies beyond temporality might very well not even be capable of being evaluated through such temporally based morality.

The problem of evil is especially problematic for theistic God and it is often seen as the most damning evidence against God. The problem seems to rise when God is considered to be both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. Lot of terrible things happen in the world all the time and it is certainly difficult to reconcile that fact with omnibenevolent and omnipotent God. Why would such being allow evil to exist? One answer comes in form of afterlife where good deeds are rewarded in heaven and evil gets what is due in hell. As was already mentioned above, the divine point of view is capable of removing the problem; any amount of suffering can be infinitesimal or even non-existent from the divine point of view. Lifelong suffering is infinitesimal when compared to eternity and non-existent when compared to a mode of being that does not even possess any concepts related to suffering and evil.

Even after acknowledging the vast gulf between human and divine cognition, I believe it is possible to use mysticism to build enough stepping stones to validate an assumption for the possibility, and even likelihood, of a relation between the Other and human morality without a major leap of faith to close the gap. Jones writes:

Moral action-guides are usually an integral part of mystical traditions' path to enlightenment (since such actions lessen a sense of self-centeredness). How morality on such paths would relate to the mystic's enlightened state is not clear. If morality is an integral part of the unenlightened life, must it be part of the enlightened life? Or does the mystic in enlightenment transcend morality? That is, is morality merely a tool on the unenlightened path that loses its significance after enlightenment? Is morality part of the temporal and not the eternal?⁹⁹

It seems clear that these moral action-guides play a significant role in reaching mystical experience and thus enlightened state (as Jones defines it: "knowledge of the fundamental truths of the nature of reality and a life in accordance with them"). Since these moral action-guides have such an important role in approaching the Other, I believe it is enough to validate an assumption for the relation, but not identity between the Other and human morality. Jones continues with valid questions, but we will not be pursuing them further. For now, and in relation to morality, I will conclude that there is a possible connection

⁹⁹ Jones 1993: 189-190

between the ability to experience the Other and morality even if we cannot say anything conclusive about the morality of the Other.

4.3.3. Omnipotence

Omnipotence is a necessary God's attribute for theistic theology since their God is seen as an active creator and sustainer of everything that exists. I see no reason to think that the Other could not be omnipotent in a sense that it could have the power or ability to bring out any state of affairs. At the same time, I see no reason for omnipotence to be a necessary attribute of the Other. This is a clear example of how human point of view forces itself to the notion of the Other (God). We as human beings do things, our whole life is in a sense, that of doing. And thus the concept of power (as in capability) makes sense to us, as we can do some things while we cannot do other things because we lack some necessary requirements or capabilities for its successful accomplishment. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we do not, depending on various factors. Once again we can see that the God of scriptures (Old Testament) who "does things" is very human like and potentially the main source of this notion of omnipotence as a necessary attribute for God. We just cannot accept an absolute being that is actually active and does something but ends up failing to do it. "Doing" anything at all already fixes the whole topic into the realm of human point of view as I believe that the whole concept of doing is not a necessary concept for the Other. Doing something in general requires causality or at the very least some sort of temporal activity and existence. The Other would be of one kind at one moment and of another kind the next, which would make the Other relative instead of absolute. It would also force the Other to the subject-object dichotomy, which clearly is an ontological step with no grounds and thus would most likely take us to an endless path with no real (or at least useful) answers. Here, of course, I am attributing human point of views myself. In the end, any talk about the omnipotence of God, the Other becomes meaningless in regards to any fixed ontological status since such status would require to be grounded on human point of view.

Forcing human point of view and concepts stemming from it to things that do not adhere to them gives us unnecessary dilemmas regarding the Other and its absolute counterparts, however they are named. One popular example would be the question if omnipotent God

can create a stone so heavy that it cannot lift it itself. When we look at this question after separating the divine and human point of views, we can say that from the divine point of view it is not necessary for God to manifest such attributes as creating stones and lifting stones. From this point of view, God is fully capable of not doing such things and still remain absolute. It is the human point of view that makes the question problematic. Of course, even from the human point of view the dilemma can be approached. For example, St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out that there are two different kinds of possibilities when it comes to God “doing all things possible”. Relative possibility means that the possibility to do something is relative to a specific being, for example birds’ possibility to fly where humans cannot fly. Absolute possibility on the other hand is something that is not contradictory like classic example of a married bachelor. Aquinas states that God’s omnipotence is in regards to absolute possibilities, which means that everything that does not involve such contradiction of terms is within Gods power.¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, I would say that omnipotence as it is understood from human point of view is just not a necessary attribute of the Other, but also a very unlikely attribute.

4.3.4. Eternality

Time and eternity provide one of the greatest and most intriguing paradoxes. What, if anything was before existence? This question is inherently tied to problem of *creatio ex nihilo*; how can anything be born out of nothing. Science has made very exotic attempts to push back the beginning and/or attempted to attribute characteristics such as laws of nature to the supposed timeless void that was before time. But in the end it seems that the only valid answer to the paradox is eternity; there never was any beginning and what is now has always been. And this is of course only substituting one paradox with another. How can it be “now” if there has been infinite amount of time before it? It seems to me that the only satisfying answer to the paradox of time and beginning is to acknowledge that from the human point of view the mystery of time and eternity is now and forever beyond our ordinary conceptual capabilities.

¹⁰⁰ Rowe 2007: 6-7

I feel that eternality of the Other is very similar to its self-existence since similarly to existence, time is a concept that very well might not fit the Other insofar as we can understand time and temporality from our human point of view. However I feel that we can say that the Other does not fit well with temporal concepts of beginning and end. The Other has to be eternal but we cannot say what it actually means from human point of view. From divine point of view the concept can very well lose its meaning. In the end, I feel it is better to just humbly marvel at the mystery of existence; on the other hand those capable and brave enough to pursue the mystical path can hope to witness the timelessness of mystical experiences and for a brief moment know the eternal. Furthermore, paradoxes presented by time, eternality and creatio ex nihilo clearly bring forth the limitations of human point of view. There is something utterly mystical in the mere fact that existence exists.

4.5. Absolute and Limited Absolutes

During the mystical experience, the mystic experiences something that we can label as ‘absolute’ based on mystics’ descriptions of the experience. All is one. One is all. Everything is I. I am Everything. It is no-thing, which is everything. Even if non-mystics do not have direct access to mystical experiences or memories of them, there is a wide variety of mystical descriptions that can certainly, if not necessarily, be interpreted as experiences of the absolute. But the question arises whether the Other that mystics experience as absolute being or state is necessarily absolute.

William Kingsland defines absolute as something “which has nothing relative to it, and is therefore unitary or all-comprehensive in its nature”. And as Kingland points out, this is something that is directly in opposition to our normal way of experiencing the reality.¹⁰¹ We live in a reality and possess a type of consciousness, which relies on relativity and multiplicity to make the reality and the type consciousness we possess possible and comprehensible at least in some way and to some degree. This vast and deep gulf between the “normal” world of relations and the mystics’ world of unity is, I believe, the main source of the ineffable nature of the mystical experiences. The world and consciousness

¹⁰¹ Kingsland 1927: 1

that relies on relativity is by definition in a difficult if not impossible position to produce concepts that can bridge the gulf to a world with no such relations.

Mystics themselves certainly tend to liken their experiences to that of an absolute even if it remains obscured behind the veil of ineffability of our own conceptual making. However, even if the concept of absolute remains at least partly hidden to our non-absolute state of consciousness, we can still approach the topic of the necessity of absolute(s) in the mysticism in general and mystical experiences in particular. To me it seems that the main reason that speaks for the necessity of absolute is the voices of mystics themselves that describe their experiences in concepts that at the very least hint of absolute(s) behind them. This aspect of mysticism and absolute(s) ties it directly to the validity of mystical experiences, which we have already previously covered to some extent. However, at this point I will point out that the validity of the experiences (of absolute(s)) seems to be given in the experience itself. During the experience, the mystic is absolutely confident of the truth and validity of his/her experience; it is part of the experience that there is absolutely no doubt included. In other words, during the experience mystic is certain that it is the Truth of reality that s/he is experiencing. This does speak strongly in its own special language about the existence of this mystical absolute.

I believe that when we consider the Other, we should include the concept of absolute in it even if the concept itself remains at least partly obscured from our attempts to fully grasp it. Now, we can ask whether the Other that mystics encounter during the their mystical experience is necessarily an encounter with something that indeed is absolute, that is “which has nothing relative to it, and is therefore unitary or all-comprehensive in its nature”. Here I believe we must again look at this separately from human and divine points of views. From our everyday and ordinary human point of view the Other described in mystical experiences indeed seems to be absolute since they seem to encompass everything in single unitary vision. There are of course different flavors that can be found from various different expressions of the mystical encounters given us by mystics themselves, as was discussed in chapter dealing with perennialism. However, I believe that the Absolute is a necessary part of true mystical experience even if its detailed conceptualization cannot be complete. From the divine point of view, we can only say that the Absolute might, indeed, be fully conceptualized and be perceived as ordinary to a divine mind, and possibly including the mystic consciousness during the mystical

experience. But is it possible that what is absolute from human point of view or even mystical point of view is not absolute from the divine point of view. Can it be that the Other, which the mystic holds absolute, itself has relations to other Others? Of course we cannot know. And even if it goes against the core logic of our conceptual framework, I believe we must give room for the absolute to remain partly obscured from our prying minds. So in my view, the absolute is necessary from the human point of view and even the divine, mystical point of view, but even if the mystical experiences are valid, there remains a gulf separating us from the divine point of view.

It should be noted at this point how the absolute and all-encompassing nature of the Other relates to monotheism since “The Fundamental idea in monotheism that God is separate from the world constitutes a rejection of pantheism. According to Judeo-Christian and Islamic conception of God, the world is entirely distinct from God.”¹⁰² Mysticism, even if it does have great many proponents stemming from monotheistic traditions, seems to point more towards pantheism. Many Christian, Judaic and Islamic mystics have, of course, interpreted their experiences in a way that is more favorable to their traditions, as was also discussed on the chapter on perennialism. What we can however say here is that the notions coming from Abrahamic traditions regarding God do not fit well with the mystical experiences without interpreting them.

However, the Other’s separateness from the world is not that simple of a notion. From the human point of view that understands separateness as some things that are not fundamentally connected gets us only so far. From the divine point of view, the notion of being part of something can actually transcend our concepts to a degree that what we say about it is meaningless when it comes to the Truth of Reality, the nature of reality as it really is, regardless of our conceptual scheme. Furthermore, the notion of the Other’s separateness rises several interesting points regarding our attempt to understand the nature of the Other. For example, the separateness of the Other also means that It is independent of the world and its restraints, It is not subject to the laws of space and time, whatever they might be.

¹⁰² Rowe 2007: 14

4.6. In Conclusion

The other is extremely elusive and at least part of it is ever hidden behind ineffability. However, there is still something that can be said about it by us non-mystics even beyond the one actually obvious fact that the Other is something that can be experienced. By acknowledging that anything we say about the other is limited by the capabilities of human cognition and its conceptual framework we can distance ourselves to a safe distance and confidently speak about the other and its possible and necessary characteristics from our limited point of view. Furthermore, we can also explore the possible and necessary attributes that the other might have through the divine point of view, speculating on and imitating the mystic vision. In this chapter I only took some initial steps to understand the Other, but the main point I attempted to make was, that it is actually possible and conducive path to enter.

5. MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE

When it comes to the validity of mysticism and mystical experiences I feel that it can be illustrative to bid scientific knowledge against knowledge gained during mystical experiences as they both share similar essence and goal of uncovering, and to some extent utilizing, the truths of reality. Particularly in the contemporary and more and more secular western world science is held in great regard and is generally considered to be the one and only valid vessel towards truth whereas spiritual, religious and mystical means and truths are considered to be anti-scientific by the scientific community and thus not valid means to uncovering and understanding truths about the reality.

In this chapter I will examine some challenges that contemporary science can force on mysticism and mystical experiences. In general, I acknowledge that religion in general and mysticism in particular are for the most part incommensurable with science and bidding them against each other rarely produces anything meaningful. Naturally, some fundamentalist positions can, and in some cases, should be challenged by science. In regards to more “rational” positions coming from scholarly mysticism, any direct confrontation with scientific positions can easily become meaningless because of the incommensurability of these two positions. However, the end “goal” of mysticism does offer an interesting parallel with some scientific pursuits and I feel they are at least to some degree also commensurable.

It should be noted that when it comes to science and scientific knowledge, I rely heavily on Thomas Kuhn and his theory of paradigms and to some extent his concept of scientific revolutions. In my opinion Kuhn’s concept of paradigm and related concept of the theory-ladenness of observations is crucial to understanding and valuating scientific knowledge. I am by no means qualified to talk about Kuhn in any detail; what follows is in large parts based on my over a decade long observations of debates raging around various cosmological paradigms.

The ideal of scientific endeavors certainly can be applauded. Science is supposed to represent an unbiased, objective quest for truths regarding reality. If something is said to be ‘scientific’, it will already just by definition hold certain validity. Science and scientists

hold strong authority and influence over what and how we should think about ourselves, about the world around us and, most importantly to the subject of our paper, about the Gods and related beings or states of beings. I believe that in scientific community there is a general agreement that even if we do not yet have a final theory of everything, the theories we have now are at the very least taking our understanding towards it. Existing scientific knowledge is seen to be part of the final truth. Here I agree strongly with Kuhn whose theory of scientific revolutions denies the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge.

5.1. Mysticism and Natural Sciences

Science and religion(s) have for a long time been at odds with each other. Both are attempts to tell us truths about ourselves and the reality surrounding us. But their methodologies and approaches are very different. Religious truths are primarily based on doctrines, revelations and faith whereas scientific truths are primarily based on observations, gathered evidence and internal coherency with what is considered to be scientific facts together with the dominant paradigms.

To repeat, I am well aware that this kind of simple presentation does not do justice to the whole spectrum of different philosophical views on both science and religion and their truths. When observed neutrally from the outside, the battle between religions and sciences has been very long and still involves plenty of stalemates in the spirit of yes-no argumentation. One of the main argument from science against God is that such being has not been detected and that such being is not necessary part of theories describing reality. I have no intention to take directly part in that particular debate. Instead, my goal here is lot more narrow, and my inquiry carefully circumscribed: I wish to compare two ideas, two objects that are fundamentally as different from each other as anything can be, yet our attempts to know something about them share interesting similarities, as we shall see.

5.1.1. The Other vs Singularity

From the side of natural sciences I have chosen to focus on *gravitational singularity*, something that cannot be measured without resorting to infinities. Yet it, and its necessary companion the *black hole* that cannot be directly observed, are generally accepted objects by natural sciences and at least to some degree even necessary objects that are required to exist for our relativistic theory of space-time to be true. Against singularity and black hole descends *the Other*. It should be noted that I do not consider the Other and mysticism to be waging the same battle as non-mystical religions do against science even if religions certainly can, and I would say perhaps even should, use mysticism to strengthen their position. Of course, in harnessing mysticism to fight the wars against science, religions should realize and accept the necessary changes to religious thoughts and truths that come with accepting mysticism as something that is not based on any specific religion, as I have argued to be the case.

I admit, and it should be kept in mind, that I am not an expert when it comes to neither black holes nor the epistemology involved when putting together mathematical constructs and the actual reality they supposedly portray. However, I believe that no such special expertise is needed since for our purpose we are only required to touch the very basic layers of scientific methodologies and the peculiarities of black holes.

5.1.1.1. How are they “observed”?

The Other: Direct experience of the Other is acquired by the mystic during the mystical experience. Since the mystics often describe their experience using concepts such as unity and union, it appears that the Other is observed in its totality and the mystical experience itself includes veridical confirmation of the Other for the mystic him/herself.

Black hole: Direct observation is not possible since by their very nature, black holes do not directly emit any signals other than the hypothetical Hawking radiation; since the Hawking radiation for an astrophysical black hole is predicted to be very weak, this makes it impossible to directly detect astrophysical black holes from the Earth. Astrophysicists searching for black holes thus have to rely on indirect observations. A black hole's

existence can sometimes be inferred by observing its gravitational interactions with its surroundings.¹⁰³

It seems to me that the Other makes a stronger case for validity since it is actually directly observed whereas black hole is not. The claim for the validity of the Other of course depends on the validity of mystics themselves when viewed as “observational instruments”. So before declaring mystics and the Other to be more valid, we need to consider the *validity of observational instruments used*.

5.1.1.2. Validity of “observations”?

The Other: The Other is directly observed only during the mystical experience and immediately after the mystical experience when the direct contact with the Other is over the observational instrument, i.e. the mystic, can no longer access the mystical framework required for the direct observation. The Other is fully revealed only during the mystical experience and outside the experience mystic is once again bound by the normal, non-mystical consciousness, mystic’s every attempt to describe the observation of the Other is clouded by ineffability. Even if the Other, as it is observed by the mystic during the mystical experience, cannot be described and this ineffability certainly devalues the observation, it is not enough to disprove that the Other actually was encountered.

Multiple observations are always more reliable than a single one. Throughout the history there have been numerous reported “observations” of the Other. Many mystics have recorded encountering the Other. When we consider that we have many observations done in great many circumstances we can certainly make a case for the existence of the Other. It has been observed throughout history by various instruments (mystics) under various conditions (background frameworks and methodologies of mystics). There is not much reason to disbelieve all these hundreds of testimonies par some grand conspiracy that has been ongoing for ages.

Furthermore, perennialism can and in my opinion does give validity to the notion that the experienced Other has been the same despite the variance in its description. In conclusion, I think it is valid to say that it is clear that mystics (observational instruments) do

¹⁰³ Wikipedia on black holes: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hole

encounter (observe) ‘something’ during the mystical experience and even if this ‘something’ is lost in its complete, mystical form when the mystical experience is over, it still can act as a premise for further thought, the Other exists even if its true nature is clouded by ineffability and the limitations of our conceptual capabilities. Evelyn Underhill writes:

[Mystics] should claim from us the same attention that we give to other explorers of countries in which we are not competent to adventure ourselves; for the mystics are the pioneers of the spiritual world, and we have no right to deny validity to their discoveries, merely because we lack the opportunity or the courage necessary to those who would prosecute such explorations for themselves.¹⁰⁴

It is not just that the Other has been observed by great many mystics, but it should also be acknowledged that every one of us is a potential mystic; potential instrument capable of experiencing the Other. Opportunity and courage might not be enough. It is entirely possible that only some of us actually have the potential to attain mystical experiences, but considering all the various backgrounds that have “produced” mystics, I strongly believe that the potentiality is not that uncommon.

Black Hole: As already stated, black holes cannot be directly observed and only clues for their existence comes from intermediary observations of the supposed gravitational effects of black holes. For our purposes, I do not feel that it is necessary to go into great details regarding the observational instruments used in detecting various types of effects that are attributed to black holes. It is enough to say that modern day scientific instruments are capable of detecting electromagnetic spectrum from radio waves to gamma rays. It is clear that just as the mystics observe something, so do these telescopes, antennas and other instruments. Problems arise when these observations are tied into something that is not observed. The first layer of problem is that black hole is purely mathematical, theoretical construct. As far as I understand it, it is some sort of mathematical beast that is necessitated by the rules of the mathematical jungle also known as theory of relativity.

Things get quite messy when we consider that black hole itself is mathematical construct and at its center even the math has to stretch outside mathematicians comfort zone to

¹⁰⁴ Underhill 2004: 4

infinity. Science itself admits that the theoretical tools at its disposal do not apply at the level of singularity. What the science considers to be the laws of nature (as far as theory of relativity is concerned) simply break down there or, it might be more prudent to say that what science considers to be the laws of nature cannot simply be applied there.

As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality. – Albert Einstein

This famous quote by Einstein points out the problem of these purely mathematical constructs. There always remains a gap between reality and a mathematical model trying to describe it. As I already conceded, I am no expert on the fields of philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics or epistemology but I still feel confident enough to agree with Einstein regarding the gap between reality itself and laws of mathematics.

Besides the black hole being a mathematical construct derived from other mathematical constructs, there are other problems involved. The problem of theory-ladenness of observations is something that cannot be ignored. Even the observations of the supposed effects of black holes are not pure observations but instead they are dependent on various theories. For example, when what we consider to be cloud of interstellar gas is observed to signal the presence of a black hole, we are also required to use theories concerning interstellar gas and its behavior which in turn is another set of mathematical constructs. Distances are of great importance in cosmology and so we also need to apply the theories regarding the measurements of distances in space, which means more mathematical constructs. Furthermore, there are scientists who do not agree with parts of the dominant paradigms and even if the vast majority is in agreement, the dissenting voices should be noted in this evaluation.¹⁰⁵

In the end, our observations of supposed black hole is not just indirect, but also it relies on many other theories for the observation to be true. I see little in support of a claim that the Other and mystics observing it would inevitably have less validity than black holes. Black holes, for their merit, as long as the theory describing them is valid, do have much more substance since science is not limited by ineffability, which certainly greatly limits our possible understanding of the Other.

¹⁰⁵As a personal tribute to daring minds, I wish to mention Halton Arp (1927-1013) and Margaret Burbidge (b.1919) as dissenting, yet highly respected voices. If intrinsic redshift that they have advocated ends up being true, there will, or at least should, finally be a long overdue scientific revolution.

In conclusion, it seems that mystical knowledge of the Other is no less valid than scientific knowledge about black holes. It all comes down to the validity of instruments used and there seems to be very little rationale to dismiss mystics as reliable instruments. The Other that is observed remains ever hidden under the veil of ineffability and it is only the instruments themselves that can adequately understand the Other that was observed. However, as I have attempted to show in previous chapters the mere fact of mystical experiences as an actual phenomenon does provide a way for further understanding and knowledge that even non-mystics can take part in. The scientific knowledge of black holes is extremely theory-laden and the singularity itself is still acknowledged an anomaly, something that cannot be fully explained. In my opinion the something called black hole is certainly no more valid than the something called the Other. On the other hand, the uncertainty, or “scientific ineffability” currently surrounding the black holes does actually have a chance to be overcome, whereas the ineffability of mystical experiences can only be completely overcome by mystics during the mystical experience.

5.1.2. The Tao of Physics

Detecting mystical elements in the modern physics has become quite popular in some circles especially after physicist Frithjof Capra published *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* in 1975. I will briefly cover parallels as presented by Capra.

The unity of all things. First parallel Capra examines is between the experienced unity and oneness of all things during the mystical experience and the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. He attempts to show that:

The most important characteristic of the Eastern world view-one could almost say the essence of it-is the awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole; as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Capra 1975: 130

Is referring to a same unity as:

Quantum theory thus reveals an essential interconnectedness of the universe. It shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smallest units. As we penetrate into matter, we find that it is made of particles, but these are not the ‘basic building blocks’ in the sense of Democritus and Newton. They are merely idealizations which are useful from a practical point of view, but have no fundamental significance.¹⁰⁷

and:

Quantum theory has abolished the notion of fundamentally separated objects, has introduced the concept of the participator to replace that of the observer, and may even find it necessary to include the human consciousness in its description of the world. It has come to see the universe as an interconnected web of physical and mental relations whose parts are only defined through their connections to the whole.¹⁰⁸

I am not qualified to talk about any details of Copenhagen or any other interpretation of quantum physics for that matter. But the fact that it is called ‘interpretation’ already reveals that quantum physics cannot at this point provide us with definite arguments for or against any parallels regarding unity present during mystical experience and unity present in quantum-level observations.

Also as an advocate of the problem of theory-ladenness of observations, the extreme mathematical nature of quantum physics is in very problematic to me. According to Capra:

The properties of the particles are then deduced from a mathematical analysis of their tracks; such an analysis can be quite complex and is often carried out with the help of computers. All these processes and activities constitute the act of measurement.¹⁰⁹

The “tracks” require our theories regarding the particle accelerator to be true. “The properties of the particles” require the ‘quite complex’ mathematical theory involved to be true for the result finally appearing on the computer screen to be true.

¹⁰⁷ Capra 1975: 137

¹⁰⁸ Capra 1975: 142

¹⁰⁹ Capra 1975: 135

Capra continues to bring up examples of how physics incorporates mystical elements in them like the wave-particle duality that, according to him, “transcends the narrow framework of opposite concepts.”¹¹⁰

In my opinion, it would certainly be interesting and maybe even confirmatory to mystical worldview if physics as presented by Capra actually were true. However, in my view the “mystical” elements of science can just as well, if not more likely, result from the problems and inconsistencies within these scientific theories rather than as a result of some mystical reality revealing itself in the scientific experiments. Furthermore, I believe that even if mystical experiences are accompanied by a physical phenomenon, it might be something that cannot be measured by physical means. For example, assuming that the particle physics are true in a sense that when studying the subatomic level of matter, we need to increase the amount of energy used in particle accelerators to be able to detect “deeper” into atomic structure. Now, if the laws governing atomic structure are such that uncovering the “deepest” structure within that structure would require more energy than the whole of reality/universe has, it would follow that the deepest and thus truest understanding of physical reality would remain ever outside of our inquiries.

5.2. Mysticism and Cognitive Science of Religion

Cognitive science of religion is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of religions. The focus, as the name implies, is on the human cognition and how it and its functions are related to the experiential facet of religions. Multidisciplinary approach has its share of strengths and weaknesses. As I see it, the main strength is the wide range of different approaches it offers to the same topic. When researching human cognition, great many disciplines can have their say. It is a valid subject matter for psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, evolutionary biology etc. Furthermore, cognition and consciousness are such ambiguous concepts that it is rather easy to see them play role in virtually every human endeavor. Every human activity, be it religious or not, is somehow related to some aspects of cognitive activity and thus can be studied by the conglomerate of all these cognitive sciences. This extremely wide scope

¹¹⁰ Capra 1975: 154

of not just methods, but also potential research topics is indeed a great strength, but it is also a potential source for several weaknesses.

The different sciences that are part of cognitive sciences (of religion) are more or less developed fields of studies with their own established paradigms. By themselves they have clear paradigm-enforced boundaries in which they operate. For example, the set of valid questions that they can seek to answer and specific set of methodological tools that are allowed to be utilized when answering the questions are all governed by these paradigms. There are always questions that are not allowed, questions that do not fit inside their respective paradigms and basically are not considered to be part of that particular field. For example the methodologies that computer science (artificial intelligence) utilizes and the questions it seeks to answer have very little overlap with the methodologies and questions of sociology or evolutionary psychology. And even if there is some overlap in the possible questions and methodologies specified by different paradigms there are still several problems that need to be addressed.

First, the conceptual framework of different fields of study might use the same terminology but actually refer to different things. For example concepts such as consciousness, intuition, emotion, experience, motivation, desire, will, representation, mental state, mental act are all defined differently depending on the paradigm. In other words, even if cognitive science of religion includes many different fields of study, they can be incommensurable with each other and their actual ability to work on the same question at the same time is greatly limited. Of course same question can be approached separately by each of them and reach separate answers, but then the question is if the results can be compared satisfactorily or do they even talk about the *exact* same phenomenon. Ideally these different approaches would complement each other, but it will require serious and careful considerations in order to avoid drawing wrong conclusions.

5.2.1. Rational Mysticism

I believe that it is entirely possible, but by no means necessary, for mystical experiences to occur on a causal level that cannot be observed through physical means. This might sound like far reaching speculation but I strongly feel that the extraordinary nature of the subject matter justifies extraordinary approaches and speculations. However, the

extraordinary nature of mystical experiences and the nature of Reality they portray do not rule out ordinary and detectable counterparts in the physical world. There have been attempts to understand and even justify mysticism and mystical experiences through science. Cognitive sciences have made some attempts to discover the cause of mystical experiences inside our brains and some advocates of mystical thought have used natural sciences to affirm their position.

Significance and value of mysticism for cognitive studies and understanding of human consciousness comes from the fact that mystical experiences represent truly unique form of consciousness where the conceptual nature of normal, non-mystical consciousness is not present—or at least it is transformed to something different where our normal understanding of concepts and their nature and role cannot be applied. Study of non-ordinary states of consciousness is certainly nothing new and for example abnormal psychology deals exclusively with such states of consciousness. However the focus of scientific approaches to what they consider to be mystical experiences seems to be actually concerned with religious and psychoactive experiences rather than the kind of mystical experiences discussed here.

John Horgan in his book *Rational Mysticism*, explores several scientific studies into mysticism. Mysticism and mystical experiences as they have been outlined in this study can to some extent be found when Horgan begins his book by exploring the perennialistic view of Houston Smith after which he presents the contextualism of Steven Katz (constructivism vs perennialism). But after that he begins his exploration into more “rational mysticism” and the connection to the kind of mysticism presented in this study is no longer relevant since mysticism and mystical experience seems to become equated with any type of non-standard form of experience. However, it does give us excellent example of what scientific ‘rational mysticism’ is. I will briefly cover the various scientific approaches to mysticism presented by Horgan to show if and how they could also relate with the kind of mysticism presented in this paper.

The first scientific approach is what radiologist Andrew Newberg and psychiatrist Eugene D’Aquili have named neurotheology. Their method was to use brain scanning technology to search for the neural component of mystical experiences. They are perennialists in the sense that they believe that there is a “sense of unity deeper than the conveyed by ordinary consciousness” in all spiritual experiences:

This sensation can range from the mild communion that a congregation feels while singing a hymn to the “state of absolute unitary being” in which you lose all sense of self, of subject-object duality. This state (which Ken Wilber has called causal awareness and others have named the introvertive mystical experience) “seems to be identical in all places and times of which we have record,” Newberg and D’Aquili wrote, echoing the rhetoric of the perennial philosophy.¹¹¹

They scanned the brains of eight Buddhist monks during their meditation and three Franciscan nuns during contemplative prayer. The result was that “most of the Buddhists and nuns displayed increased neural activity in the prefrontal cortex and decreased activity in the posterior superior parietal lobe, as Newberg and D’Aquili had predicted”. And from this they came to a conclusion that these experiences are based “not on delusional ideas, but on experiences that are neurologically real”.¹¹²

It is clear, and Newberg himself admits as much to Horgan during an interview, that the brain activities they recorded were not necessarily of “true” or “full” mystical experiences.¹¹³ I would say that a meditation experience achieved in a laboratory with wires attached to your head is actually very far from the kinds of mystical experience we are actually dealing with and interested in. It is one thing to ask the test subject to press button (to initiate the scan) when s/he experiences a sense of “blessedness” and totally other different scenario to ask one to press button when one is in a mystical state and “United with Reality”. I would go as far as to say that physical activity and interest to press buttons is extremely unlikely during “true” or “full” mystical experience. However, I do believe that if and when we have brain-scanning technology that can record not just snapshots of particular brain states but clearly record the changing brain activity leading to, during and after a true mystical experience, it could provide us with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. But I believe we are still quite far from that point. Firstly, we would need the technology that can do that without disturbing the mystic and, secondly, we would need to find a mystic and a way to verify his mystical authenticity.

¹¹¹ Horgan 2003: 74

¹¹² Horgan 2003: 75

¹¹³ Horgan 2003: 81

Horgan next presents the work of Michael Persinger, whose “rational mysticism” also focuses on brain. He has even created a machine that sends electromagnetic pulses to specific regions of brain to induce a “sense of presence” with a 40% success rate compared to 15% of a control group.¹¹⁴ There is really nothing to say about this, except it showcases how misunderstood mysticism and mystical experiences are. ‘Sense of presence’ is hardly even a non-ordinary experience and, in my opinion, has nothing to do with the actual mystical experiences. I would be greatly surprised if one day our brain could be artificially activated to produce actual mystical experience but I cannot, of course, deny the possibility for such a miracle.

However far from touching actual mystical experiences these two examples are, they do showcase that cognitive science and mysticism are not mutually exclusive. In my opinion mysticism provides valuable framework for scientific research from which to approach and seek the boundaries of human consciousness.

5.2.2. Mystic Delusion

Richard Dawkins, famous champion of atheism attacks the possibility for the existence of God in his book *The God Delusion*. “You say you have experienced God directly? Well, some people have experienced a pink elephant, but that probably doesn't impress you.”¹¹⁵ Even if he speaks about experiencing God directly in that quote, he does not speak about actual mystical experiences at all. As a sign of Dawkins’ ignorance of mysticism, it should also be noted that in *The God Delusion* the term ‘mysticism’ appears only once, and even that appears in the context of Dawkins quoting Einstein.¹¹⁶ He focuses on religious experiences such as seeing angels or hearing God’s voice and processes to give plenty of examples how our brains can easily create such experiences without actual object being present:

I say all this just to demonstrate the formidable power of the brain's simulation software. It is well capable of constructing 'visions' and 'visitations' of the

¹¹⁴ Horgan 2003: 92

¹¹⁵ Dawkins 2006: 88

¹¹⁶ Dawkins 2006: 15

utmost veridical power. To simulate a ghost or an angel or a Virgin Mary would be child's play to software of this sophistication.¹¹⁷

Even if Dawkins does not seem to be aware of the difference between religious and mystical experiences, his arguments against religious experiences can also be turned against mystical experiences. How do we know that mystical experiences are not just hallucinations, some kind of products of cognitive activity where nothing actual is been experienced?

I feel that it is not possible to completely deny the possibility that mystical experiences are like hallucinations, experiences fully formed and contained within mystics' cognitive apparatus. However, in my view it is highly unlikely for several reasons. Firstly, even hallucinations are ordinary experiences in a sense that they include conceptual framework similar to that of any ordinary experience. Subject and object are still present during hallucinatory experiences and the experiences consist of separate and definable entities. If we consider all the requirements that are needed for an experience to be called mystical experience, it is clear that no ordinary hallucination can fulfill the requirements. Ordinary hallucinations differ from mystical experiences just as much as ordinary experiences do.

I believe that the only way for this type of argument against the veridicality of mystical experiences as experiences of the Other to hold any potential value is to create a new category of hallucinatory experiences that includes all the same requirements as mystical experiences themselves do. However, it appears to me that the only thing that is achieved by labeling mystical experiences of the Other to 'mystical hallucinations of the Other' is to limit the locational "source" of the mystical experience closer to mystic's cognitive apparatus. This sort of limitation, however, to me seems artificial and does not even work as an argument against the veridicality of mystical experiences. By definition, the Other is experienced in a way that transcends subject-object separation and is not bound by ordinary conceptual framework. This suggests that the veridicality of the experience itself is not limited by any argument that attempts to limit the mystical experience within the boundaries of mystic's cognitive framework since it would have to assume that the veridicality of the Other requires it to be located somewhere outside of the mystic.

¹¹⁷ Dawkins 2006: 9

It might seem unjustified to use the supernatural characteristics of mystical experiences as a valid reason to bypass any need to describe the process by which the mystical experiences is attained. In my view the discovery of such process would certainly be valuable and thus I see no reason for the science not to keep looking for one. However, I believe that our current understanding regarding human cognitive faculties and our ability to observe and measure them is still too limited. Even if we were to discover some sort of ‘God field or energy’, something that permeates everything existing, and even if we could somehow connect that to mystical experiences, it would only give us verification that there actually is a physically detectable process involved. But by itself this would not reveal anything else. As Henry Bergson already put it over a century ago:

[...] we do not prove and we never shall prove by any reasoning that the psychic fact is fatally determined by the molecular movement. For in a movement we may find the reason of another movement, but not the reason of a conscious state: only observation can prove that the latter accompanies the former.¹¹⁸

To truly and completely understand mystical experiences we would need to discover a new language, a new way of communication capable of non-conceptual descriptions. This is, of course, virtually impossible. Consequently, attempts to understand mysticism should focus on refining and sharpening our concepts to gain ever better understanding of the Other—not just in theory but also in practice.

However, even if “normal” hallucinations are not capable of producing actual mystical experiences, there is nothing that can stop someone from claiming of having had mystical experience without ever having had anything of the like. Because of the ineffable nature of mystical experiences, anyone with even little knowledge about mysticism can describe authentic sounding mystical experience. Deception is no stranger to any discipline, scientific or otherwise. Yet mysticism is not in a very good position in this regard since there is not much that can be done to verify the truthfulness of mystical claims since the described experience cannot be reproduced by any ordinary means. Verification capabilities in this sense are directly proportional to our lie detection capabilities.

¹¹⁸ Bergson 1950: 148

I feel that examining context does often provide a rather reliable way to detect falsehood. Good example would be a note sewn inside the coat of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) that was found after his death:

The year of grace 1654 / Monday, November 23, day of Saint Clement, pope and martyr, / and others in the martyrology. / Vigil of Saint Chrysogonus, martyr, and others. / From about ten-thirty in the evening to about half an hour after midnight.

Fire. / God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants. / Certitude, certitude; feeling, joy, peace. / God of Jesus Christ. Deum meum et Deum vestrum. / "Thy God shall be my God." / Forgetting the world and everything, except God. / He is only found by the paths taught in the Gospel. / Grandeur of the human soul. / "Just Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you." / Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. / I separated myself from him: Dereliquerunt me lantern aquae vivae. / "My God, will you abandon me?" / May I not be eternally separated from him. / "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ." / Jesus Christ. / Jesus Christ. / I separated myself from him; I fled him, renounced him, crucified him. / May I never be separated from him! / He is only kept by the paths taught in the Gospel. / Total and sweet renunciation. / Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my director. / Eternally in joy for a day of trial on earth. / Non obliviscar sermones tuos. Amen.¹¹⁹

If anything, I feel that it can be safely assumed that Pascal did not sew the note describing his experience with an intent to deceive. I feel confident to say that he actually did experience something described in the note. Whether or not it was an actual mystical experience is another question, but at the very least any intentional deceit can be ruled out.

5.3. In Conclusion

There is no doubt that natural sciences are generally considered to be the antithesis of religion. Creator God is denounced by mathematical Big Bang that supposedly justifies birth and the nature of the universe in all its temporal and spatial glory. However, science does not really know why Big Bang Banged and is in its current form basically a case of

¹¹⁹ Text with additional commentary can be found on Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion & Science: <http://inters.org/faith-reason-pascal-memorial>

creatio ex nihilo and as such Creator can be attributed. Of course, science cannot accept that something is created out of nothing so the scientists armed with complex mathematical models have conjured up all kinds of dimensions, multiverses and strange matter fluctuations to describe what, if anything, existed before space and time. I have heard this trend to be labeled as mathemagics, a fitting name in my agreeably uneducated opinion. In more down to earth manner, also evolutionary biology challenges religious notions regarding creation of humans and other biological beings. God and other forms of divinity are easily bypassed in scientific thought because most importantly such things or beings are not required by current scientific theories and also there is no empirical evidence that prove the existence of such things or beings.

In the end I do not see natural sciences to have anything to give to mysticism; their challenges can only be directed to some specific mystical doctrines that some mystics might explicate in their works, most often in relation to their traditional background and as I see it, having little connection to their actual mystical side. Mysticism, as long as it is “true”, might have a lot to offer to natural sciences. It all depends whether the Unity observed during mystical experiences could also be detected by some physical instrument. Quantum mechanics seem to already be making claims in that direction, but in my opinion such claims are premature but it will certainly be interesting to see if and how such claims and discoveries mature over time through technological and theoretical advancements. I cannot deny that the strangeness and charm of quantum mechanics could not be related with the strangeness and charm of mysticism.

Mystics are human beings and can be studied as such. They may be peculiar characters especially after their mystical Realization and this peculiarity could make relatively easy to capture research topic. To borrow concepts from Underhill; cognitive science of religion could most certainly study *Mystic Life* all the way from its early stages to its culmination as *Unitive Life*. Underhill writes in her ever eloquent way:

It is the peculiarity of the Unitive Life that it is often lived, in its highest and most perfect forms, in the world; and exhibits its works before the eyes of men [...] The spirit of man having at least come to full consciousness of reality, completes the circle of Being; and returns to fertilize those levels of reality from which it sprang.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Underhill 2004: 414

In the end I don't believe that there is any way to (scientifically) verify that actual Absolute was experienced, the absolute verification remains sole domain of mystics themselves. However, the afterglow of their illumination might very well be detectable.¹²¹ I do not know what kind of psycho-biographical method cognitive science of religion could utilize in studying the historical mystics, but I cannot think of any reason why it could not or should not be done. I would also be quite wary of labeling the contemporary "mystics" as representatives of the highest tier mysticism, but they could certainly form another set of research subjects. Studying these contemporary living mystics, their lives and detailed context within which their experiences took/take place could certainly provide valuable scientific understanding for scholarly mysticism. More so if I am wrong in my reluctance to accept them as representatives of true mystics, a possibility that I readily acknowledge. But as long as my understanding of experiences themselves is valid, no matter how in depth case study was conducted, the experience itself and its mechanism would stay hidden. Several case studies might establish some boundaries in which they take place, but I am confident that no detailed category for contexts/methods/etc. is possible except for maybe some general motivation driving these mystics, which would actually be extremely interesting discovery.

Cognitive science (of religion) also has relatively young fields. For example psychology and neuroscience are just by themselves still seeking their identity and evolving rapidly. This fact can be seen as a great relief and many new, even revolutionary advanced might be on the horizon. However, this also means that whenever cognitive scientists begins with "based on latest research.." one should remember that the "latest research" of today might very well be considered archaic in few years, especially in the case of neurosciences.

The core of mysticism in the way I approach it works outside naturalistic explanations. But there are certainly some layers outside the core itself I would not mind cognitive science of religion to inspect. However, in my view the core itself cannot be altered by such approaches but as long as the paradigm of (true) mysticism is integrated in the research it could perhaps bring some light to the ever elusive mystical core and as a final concession; maybe even point way towards pathways for deeper understanding.

¹²¹ Underhill herself disagrees with the notion that Unitive Life could be measured

6. VALUE OF MYSTICISM

The value of mysticism, I argue, is certainly not limited to the mystics themselves, but the acknowledgment of the existence of mystical phenomenon allows us to pursue the matter further and as I strongly believe, gain valuable, if not insights of certainty, then at the very least new points of views to examine nothing less than the nature of our own existence and the nature of reality within which we exist. In this chapter I will explore the *potential* of mysticism; what is it that mysticism and scholarly mysticism can offer not just as a phenomenon but also as a practice. What does the mysticism offer, what is its value?

6.1. Perennialism

In the chapter on perennialism, I believe it was shown that even if the truth of perennialism is not without question, it is well-grounded enough to easily justify and, I would claim, even demand further exploration to see the sort of conclusions that can be reached when the truth of perennialism is taken as a premise. This leads me to formulate the following premise: *There exists a mystical state of being, which holds a universal truth that can be attained through different methodologies stemming from different traditions.*

From this, several valuable conclusions regarding our understanding of religious traditions will follow. Firstly, it becomes clear that there is no single religious tradition, theology, or belief system that holds hegemony of any kind of mystical truth over others. Abrahamic religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and in fact most, if not all, religious traditions have something I have decided to call ‘mystical potential’. The Truth and the Other is at least potentially available to any tradition that acknowledges the existence of the Other, God, Absolute, the Ultimate reality, something above and/or beyond our normal state of being and existence. I believe that the wide cultural, social and religious (including non-religious) variety of mystics throughout the ages clearly shows that the intention and motivation to discover the Other is if not the only, but certainly extremely important, methodological aspect that matters. From this conclusion we can say that when

it comes to the aspects revealed in, and stemming from, mystical experience, every religion, tradition and belief system is just as correct as any other. Our understanding of the nature of the Other determines the significance of this conclusion. If the Other indeed is fundamental state of Reality and source of Meaning, then the significance and value of the perennialistic mysticism is beyond measure.

On practical level, differences between religions and belief systems could be reduced to a matter of personal taste. Or perhaps in a more proper tone, all of them could be elevated to be similarly correct pathways to a higher truth. I recognize the near impossibility of integrating such an idea to existing religious dogmas and doctrines, but it could certainly act as an effective catalyst to religious pluralism. I wish to add, even if this is mostly in the spirit of day dreaming, that if the truth perennialism was accepted by religious practitioners, wouldn't it mean that all the terrible acts done in the name of religions would cease to happen. How is that for a value, even if only day dreamy kind? Secondly, we can conclude that since the 'mystical potential' has no necessary connection to the specific theoretical and theological background of the belief systems, it follows that the nature of the Other cannot be tied directly to any such backgrounds, but each belief system can still partake in pursuing the Other. From the point of view of mysticism, religiosity and religions hold great value, but fundamental positions within them are regarded ill-founded even if they still allow the pursuit of mystical experiences.

6.2. Ethics and Morality

Also this mystic wisdom gained during mystical experience is not just knowledge about how things really are. It necessarily comes with a practical aspect. With mystic wisdom comes understanding of meaning, which guides the way we live. It would be tempting to say that a mystic after his/her mystical experience would from the human point of view become if not morally perfect then at least very nearly so. Smith's position is along these lines: "[M]ature mystical knowledge must manifest itself throughout one's life. "If you think you are advancing toward unity with God or the absolute," he said, "and are not growing in love and charity toward your fellow person, you're just deluding yourself." Smith would be "profoundly suspicious" of anyone who claimed to be enlightened but

did not exhibit these basic human virtues.”¹²² However, in regards to the question of morality, Jones points out that there are two basic positions that oppose each other. Other position is similar to that of Smith’s according to which:

[...] only mystics are truly compassionate and moral. Only mystical experiences permit us to escape our normal self-centeredness, thereby freeing and outflow of love: the lack of personal attachments enables the mystic to be deeply concerned with all people. Further, only with the proper selfless motivation can we truly help another person; otherwise, we would only be imposing our own selfish desires upon others.¹²³

It is tempting to accept this view and not just because the concept of “normal self-centeredness” rings true whenever and wherever one observes humans and humanity in action but also, I admit, because I have a personal desire to label mysticism as morally good in all its forms and glory. Unfortunately (for me and my desires), Jones presents the other position, which seems to ring true with equal clarity:

[...] the inward orientation of mystical practices leads to a total disregard of all worldly affairs. No action affects the unchanging ultimate realities, and so no act is important. A conflict this develops between the realms of morality and of spiritual freedom – morality as much as immorality is seen as the product of ignorance. Like the enlightened prisoner returning to Plato’s cave, enlightened mystics do not deem the values of our shadow world to be of ultimate significance.¹²⁴

These two alternatives also bring out an interesting contrast with my distinction between divine and human points of view. First position seems to be close to the divine point of view as far as mystical experience itself relates to it. Second position seems to describe the human point of view, a possible methodological guide to reach the Other. Just as I believe it is necessary to keep these two points of view separate, I also believe that these two positions are conceptually incompatible and need to be kept separated.

¹²² Horgan 2003: 22 (Interview with Houston Smith)

¹²³ Jones 1993: 187

¹²⁴ Jones 1993: 187

I believe that the Other is not necessarily morally good in a sense our ordinary human concepts can define and understand morality. This entails that I am forced to believe and admit that mystic during the mystical experience itself is not necessarily morally good assuming the mystic is even capable of any action that could be evaluated morally during the experience. However the ultimate goal of the mystic is not to just achieve mystical experience but to achieve enlightenment:

The goal of the mystical quest is not to attain isolated mystical experiences which may have no lasting effect upon the person but enlightenment (knowledge of the fundamental truths of the nature of reality and a life in accordance with them). This involves an inner transformation of the whole person, not merely a change of belief or experiences (although either of these may touch off the transformation). In enlightenment, a framework of belief-claims is internalized: one no longer merely accepts intellectually the idea that, say, all is impermanent: one sees that it is true of everything. This may involve no change in the belief-claims themselves nor any change in behavior if one had been adjusting one's life in accordance with this knowledge. But dispositions are transformed: one is no longer motivated even subtly by greed or by anything dependent upon misguided belief or the incomplete application of the belief framework.¹²⁵

I disagree with Jones on the point that isolated mystical experience might not have a lasting effect. Even the "mildest" versions of mystical experience we have been discussing certainly are experiences that cannot be had without leaving long, if not everlasting traces.¹²⁶ When one has had an experience of unity with the nature, with reality itself, I find it next to impossible that its effect on the mystic would just fade away like dreams. Enlightenment is something we have not been discussing since it is not the focus of this study but if the state of enlightenment is possible and achievable through mystical experience(s), then their value would reach levels that would need divine point of view to be completely understood and appreciated. Evelyn Underhill does not speak about enlightenment but of Unitive Life:

¹²⁵ Jones 1993: 190

¹²⁶ For example, the subjects of the famous "Good Friday Experiment" reported continuing positive effects of their experience even after 27 years. I will not make assumptions nor claims regarding the authenticity of their experiences as mystical in a sense that I have discussed in this study. However, at the very least the experiences do have some parallels. See Doblin 1991: 23

The Unitive Life, though so often lived in the world, is never of it. It belongs to another plane of being, moves securely upon levels unrelated to our speech; and hence eludes the measuring power of humanity. We, from the valley, can only catch a glimpse of the true life of these elect spirits, transfigured upon the mountain. They are far away, breathing another air: we cannot reach them. Yet it is impossible to over-estimate their importance for the race. *They are ambassadors to the Absolute. They vindicate humanity's claim to the possible and permanent attainment of Reality*; bear witness to the practical qualities of transcendental life.¹²⁷

If isolated mystical experiences do have a lasting effect, which I believe to be the case, they present us with a type of value that can be explored without divine point of view, without requiring mystical experiences and mystical knowledge gained from them. In my view, it cannot be denied that mystical experiences give the mystic unique viewpoint not just of the outside reality but also of their own position in relation to it. Mystical experiences in their most simple aspect show the mystic that the ordinary state of being and ordinary form of experiencing the world is not the whole truth. There is something greater out there that eludes our normal attempts to reach it. Even without divine point of view on 'unity', I believe it is valid to assume that from human point of view 'unity' is something that is capable of shattering the self-centeredness and much more.

Mystical worldview, or simply believing in mysticism can have positive affects to even non-mystics. What would the implications be to ethics and morality, to the ways we see other living beings and the world we inhabit? What if the Christian mystic's way of living the life of Christ and its essence of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" was part of the true path revealed by mystics just like the Buddha's guiding words "consider others as yourself"? The main thing here is that the mystics seem to have come up from their mystical quests with answers of this kind. Could belief in mysticism solve the many differences and conflicts that currently plague humanity? I do understand how far reaching this is, but if mysticism presents us with the true view of the reality and our place (even if mystically vague) in it and it was accepted, it would most certainly solve many problems plaguing humanity.

¹²⁷ Underhill 2004: 414. Emphasis mine.

This understanding by itself could lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful understanding of one's life. It could also alleviate, even remove, the fears regarding life's eventual ending. In addition, it could assuage one's confusions of what to do with one's life to make it count and deliberate individuals from agonizing over whether they are worthy of the gift of life—or however one decides to view the 'existence' we have received.

In sum, I see mysticism having great potential as a unifying force that could become a religious and/or spiritual tradition by itself. Its tenets are simple, the mystic way of life promotes as morale and good way of life as any religion and the mystic "facts" of Unity and Union between the Other and ourselves gives meaning to existence, even if the understanding of it remains only available during mystical experience.

6.3. Mystic Wisdom

There is no doubt that mystical experience has enormous noetic value to the mystic who is able to attain it. A whole new and fundamental type of Reality becomes directly accessible to him/her. As we have seen in the earlier chapters regarding the definitions and types of mystical experiences and the nature of the Other, nature of mystical knowledge gained from the experience is not ordinary kind of knowledge but something very different. Mystic might not come out of the experience holding a new and definite set of facts regarding the mystical nature of Reality but instead with a sense and absolutely clarity that 'something was directly encountered' (i.e. a set of facts that the Other was encountered, even if the experience is now clouded by ineffability). Just like ordinary experiences shape and form us, it is in my opinion evident that experiences at the level of mystical experiences must have a lasting impact even beyond what was discussed earlier. Even if the mystic is not able to use ordinary concepts to describe the understanding s/he now has or even categorize it as new understanding, it does not remove the possibility that s/he does have it. It can manifest itself, for example, as a sort of feeling that there exists a 'meaning' for our human existence and that there is a deep connection or even unity between everyone and everything. I would like to call this kind of mystical "information" available to mystic 'mystic wisdom', since I feel that the term wisdom has a close connection to understanding how things operate without the need to delve into the

details of specific operating parts, which again, to me, belong more to a providence of intelligence.

I feel that this “sort of feeling” must not be underestimated nor undervalued. It is one thing to believe in unity of all things and another thing to having experienced the unity of all things and knowing it is a Real state of the Reality, the Other.

6.4. Epistemology

One of the main characteristics of mystical experience and knowledge gained from it is its ineffability, as repeatedly stated by scholars and mystics alike. Mystical experience and knowledge is something that goes beyond normal reason. No amount of symbols in any form can adequately describe the experience, thus completely obscuring its full significance to those who have not attained such mystical states themselves. This negative characterization is easily seen as being something to be used against the value and validity of mystical experiences.

However, even if the true nature of the mystical experience remains inaccessible to non-mystics, we are still offered an extremely valuable domain of knowledge when we acknowledge mystical experiences as an actual and true phenomenon. It is entirely possible to form new and constructive premises from the fact that at least some humans have some faculty or condition in them that allows the mystical experiences to occur. True, there is a leap of faith involved when stating that there is an actual contact with the fundamental level of reality and the mystic during these mystical states of mind. But when considering all the arguments for the validity of these experiences that I have given in this paper, I believe this leap is very well justified and it is essential to understanding and fully exploring the potential value of mysticism.

If mystical experiences give us knowledge about fundamental nature of Reality (the Other) that is not obtainable by any non-mystical means, this leads me to formulate a new epistemological hierarchy of knowledge regarding reality and our place in it:

1. Divine point of view (mystical wisdom). Mystical knowledge available during mystical experience in which we are in direct contact with the Fundamental Reality.
2. True knowledge about the physical operations of the physical world and ourselves combined with knowledge and acknowledgement of the existence of the Other which is only directly observed during mystical experience and true knowledge what the existence of such Reality entails.
3. Knowledge and acknowledgement of the existence of the Other which is only directly observed during mystical experience and true knowledge what the existence of such Reality entails.
4. True knowledge about the physical operations of the physical world.

By 'true knowledge about the physical operations of the physical world', I am referring to ideal scientific knowledge. At the same time, I acknowledge that it might well be (and likely is) impossible to actually attain absolute certainty when it comes to scientific truths. And by 'true knowledge of what the existence of such Reality entails', I am referring to ideal philosophical knowledge, that is, a complete set of all true conclusions that can be derived from the truth of correctly understood nature of mystical experiences. I do not dare to even guess how complete a true knowledge about physical world can be. But it can certainly be said that it does not need to be complete understanding of everything physical, just that it has to be as complete as is physically possible. It may very well be that the nature of the physical reality itself limits the possible scope of how it can be measured and understood.¹²⁸

Both scientific and philosophical ideals can certainly be approached and—even if I am admittedly biased in the matter—I believe that philosophical path is easier to travel further towards the ideal than the scientific one. The problem of ineffability certainly makes the philosophical path very problematic and filled with intersections, which certainly tell us about the impossibility of ever actually reaching the final destination. Regardless, I strongly believe that even if the ideal state itself can only be attained through less travelled

¹²⁸ See chapter 5.1.2. "The Tao of Physics"

paths of the mystics, the paths left for non-mystics are still valuable and will lead to better understanding of not just mysticism, but also reality itself and even the Other.

Even if the noetic aspects of the mystical experiences are not fully veridical in nature, they certainly retain at least some (and I would say meaningful) value. The mere fact that the phenomenon of mystical experiences exist even without assuming anything about the noetic quality of the experiences, it is certainly meaningful that throughout the history of man and seemingly with no or very little regard to specific backgrounds of mystics these kind of experiences have and continue to exist. Not only does it give us a reasonable justification to assume their veridicality and pursue the meaning following such assumptions, but it also tells us something undoubtedly interesting about the nature of our consciousness that philosophers and anyone dealing with human cognition can study and potentially learn something new and meaningful about its nature.

6.5. In Conclusion

The mere possibility that the humankind may find answer to the ‘eternal why’, the mere hint of a possibility to discover the true meaning behind and beyond all the fleeting appearances that fill the normal experiences of everyday world. Can there be anything more important? Can there be anything more valuable than touching the Truth if it really is possible? To me, the answer is as clear as pure light. Nothing can be more important than finding the meaning of existence.

But, of course, it is not that simple. The mystical knowledge and any meaning that it might reveal is fully available only to mystics themselves during their mystical experiences. However, regardless of the great many difficulties that the ineffability of mystical experiences causes, it does not diminish the fact that mysticism appears to be the only vessel capable of actually validating the notion that there might actually be a meaning for existence capable of surpassing the limitations or ordinary conceptual framework.

What we can observe is the effect of gaining mystical insights to the mystics themselves. If the experience changes the mystic we can see the effects of the Other even if the Other itself remains the private property of those who have experienced it. Also, if we are able to establish the validity of mystical experiences, then it raises interesting questions for

non-mystics and maybe even the mystics themselves to pursue. Why is The Other hidden from normal use of senses and why gaining access to it requires a special set of conditions which themselves seem to vary greatly from mystic to mystic and tradition to tradition? What is the role of our physical existence and the human functions that such existence entails in relation to the possibility of transcending the limitations of human existence?

Mysticism, at least in potential has something of value to offer towards virtually any human endeavor, be it understanding of the world or ourselves. The truth of mysticism does not just give rise to a new epistemological hierarchy, but it also points towards new paths for scholars of mysticism and to anyone else willing to embrace of truth mysticism and mystical experiences as a premise.

7. CONCLUSION

Mysticism and the eternal questions it deals with have intrigued humans since ancient times; throughout the history there have been men and women who have not been satisfied with the mere appearances of the phenomenal world. These mystics, these “lovers of reality”,¹²⁹ have sought and discovered the Other. Sometimes the mystics have been revered whereas other times they have been hunted down as heretics. Mysticism is part of almost every religion but at the same time it goes above and beyond all of them. Even if mysticism—its Truths and its goals—are eternal, times change and so does the conceptions of reality and it has become increasingly difficult and less tempting to love reality. The main purpose of this thesis has been to show that mysticism still offers a valid reason and a way to connect with, and love, reality. Now that we have reached the conclusion, I will also let my personal feelings towards mysticism show more as I attempt to bring my brief foray into mysticism to its end.

7.1. Validity of Mysticism

Mystical experience that lies at the epicenter of mysticism is a very difficult concept to grasp intellectually. Not only is there a great variety of ways to define what is meant by mystical experiences in the first place, but also any attempt to understand the phenomenon of mysticism has to overcome conceptual challenges presented by their inherent ineffability. To understand mysticism, one has to accept that the most significant part of it will always remain hidden behind a barrier that only the mystics themselves are capable of breaking through.

Despite these challenges, I have tried to show that perennialism—the presence of mysticism and convincingly similar mystical experiences throughout the ages and cultures—clearly points towards a universal core behind the mystical experiences. The existence of such a core not only gives validity to the whole phenomenon of mystical

¹²⁹ An example of Evelyn Underhill’s artful use of words. It is also thanks to her and the beauty of her expressions that I discovered mysticism.

experiences but it also provides a way for non-mystics to approach the Other, the ineffable object of mystical experiences. Even if all it allows us to see is a shadow play of mystical utterances, I believe it is enough to be able to talk about that which can never be understood, that which transcends everything ordinary human conceptual schemes can reach out to.

Constructivism that stands in direct opposition to perennialism refuses to acknowledge the perennialist position regarding the unique and universal nature of mystical experiences. Constructivists refuse to accept that any experience is possible outside the epistemological assumption that presumes that there is only one general, if multifaceted, type of experience that is governed by whatever laws actually do govern the realm of human consciousness. Human mind is still a great mystery and anyone who claims otherwise shows more faith than reason towards cognitive sciences. Constructivists argue that perennialists are wrong “because of the kind of beings we are.” I would claim that it is arrogant to consider that we actually fully know what kind of beings we are. Cognitive science cannot yet explain ordinary consciousness and the few inquiries into mystical consciousness that science has undertaken have generally been conducted under misconstrued premises of what mystical experiences are. Constructivist arguments are not capable of explaining the richness of mystical experiences that often come in forms that go above and beyond the rules laid out by constructivists; they do not possess the necessary blueprints to construe mystical experiences.

I strongly believe that perennialism, or at least its essence, its central tenet of universal core behind mystical experiences, is correct. But considering the scope of the topic, I would say that even a mere possibility for perennialism to be a valid position should have everyone, including constructivists, advocating, encouraging or conducting further inquiries into perennialistic mysticism and explore the possibilities and ramifications that its basic premises entail. It seems to me that mysticism is just not very well suited to contemporary worldviews. Mere mention of the Truth, God, Absolute and other similar concepts well suited for mysticism are met with resistance out of principles rooted in the prevailing worldview mostly inspired by science.

Partly for this reason, and partly to strengthen the validity of mysticism, I challenged mysticism through science. Great unknowns are no strangers to modern science and their methods to validate them are no better, and in some cases probably even worse than those of mysticism. Complex mathematics describing objects that only few people can “understand”, only super computers can calculate, and that can never be directly observed

are applauded as great knowledge. At the same time, only few are even aware of millennia worth of experiences by men and women who have sought and discovered the Other. In other words, it is not the Spirit itself, but the spirit of the age that manages to keep mysticism at the fringes of public awareness and academia itself. It was by mere chance I discovered the beauty of mysticism myself—and am forever grateful that I did.

7.2. Value of Mysticism

A Mere assumption (and I believe that I have by shown that such an assumption is well justified) regarding the validity of mystical experiences as an actually occurring phenomenon opens up a whole plethora of possible avenues to pursue regarding mysticism and its wider meaning. Mysticism can, or maybe even should, become a significant part for the study of the nature of human consciousness and the nature of our (human) existence in general. It provides us with a new framework through which to examine the nature of reality itself. However, when using mystical experiences as a premise for a framework from which to proceed, it comes with same limitations that come with the ineffability of mystical experiences. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the human point of view in comparison to the divine point of view.

Mysticism also offers a unique and beautiful worldview that can affect even non-mystics. Even if the mystical truths remain hidden from non-mystics, it is possible to form outlines of the Other; of the Reality that is not just the Truth, but also a worthy source for us to find comfort and ultimately even meaning in. The unity or union that forms one of the essential characteristics of mystical experiences speak of a mode of existence that we each share in which we, everything and everyone, are much more than it appears. To regard mysticism as a worldview, or maybe as a view of reality, does bring it rather close to religiosity. The main difference is the vast inclusiveness of mysticism as it culminates in the motivations of mystics rather than any in set of doctrines. Understandably, this aspect of the value of mysticism is not easy to accept. However, one does not need to go as far or as deep; mysticism can easily accommodate and inspire less dedicated but also valuable approaches.

Mystical experiences as a unique conscious phenomeon should certainly open up new or at least very seldom traversed pathways not just to philosophy (for example philosophy

of mind, religion, mysticism and even epistemology), but also to cognitive sciences. The few examples of such approaches I presented in this study were inherently flawed in their undervaluation and even misunderstanding of mystical experiences. I do not know if the faculty of our consciousness or of our being that allows mystical experiences to occur can even be revealed, but there is no reason not to try. The value of such a discovery would most certainly be immense. Furthermore, as long as the validity of a specific mystic can be verified, behavioral sciences should be in a very good position to detect mystical afterglow of mystical experiences. Authentic mystics could most certainly become very interesting and revealing subjects for study.

With natural sciences application of mysticism is not so straightforward. I outlined some concerns that I have with increasingly theoretical approaches. It seems to me that science is distancing itself from reality—the very same reality whose secrets it is supposed to uncover. Mysticism on the other hand points directly at the reality in its own ineffable way. However, mysticism and the incomplete picture of reality it portrays under the veil of ineffability could still guide even natural sciences to new paths of discovery. The Other does possess qualities that might manifest in some way or form in the physical world.

7.3. Potential of Mysticism

The over hundred-year old debate between perennialism and constructivism has run its course. I do not believe that any additional debating can have a significant enough impact to turn the constructivists away from their epistemological assumptions. And I can say for certain that no amount of arguments can make me a constructivist. I wholeheartedly support various approaches in regards to ordinary experiences, but I do not see mystical experiences ever conforming to the rules governing ordinary experiences. Furthermore, the various attempts that have been made to reconcile the two positions are doomed to fail as there cannot be any common ground between mediated and unmediated mystical experiences.

Perennialism in its traditional form as a mere antithesis for constructivism has similarly run its course and it is time for it to evolve beyond its basic premises. I argued for the significance of “the Other is”, that in my opinion is the most important premise derived from perennialism and took some preliminary steps to see what such premise means and

where it can lead. There must be great many paths one could take to advance mysticism from the perennialistic position along with other approaches that acknowledge the validity and uniqueness of mystical experiences. In essence, mysticism forms a mystery of two realities—one real and the other Real—and a way to approach this mystery within, or more importantly, outside any traditional doctrines.

Mysticism is and should be valued as an eternal tradition. It is a story about the means to an eternal end. For mystics themselves it is a pathway to the Other. For the scholars of mysticism it is a framework that validates not just the eternal questions, but it also opens up interesting ways to approach and understand the ordinary world of being in the light of mystical experiences and the Other they reveal.

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